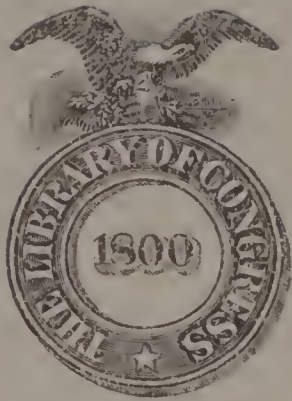


Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders in the Black Hills



Grace Harlowe's
Overland Riders Series
Jessie Graham Flower, A.M.



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"Tony!" Screamed Elfreda.

Frontispiece

Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders in the Black Hills

By

JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A.M.

Author of The High School Girls Series, The College Girls Series,
The Grace Harlowe Overseas Series, Grace Harlowe's Overland
Riders on the Old Apache Trail, Grace Harlowe's Overland
Riders on the Great American Desert, Grace Harlowe's Over-
land Riders Among the Kentucky Mountaineers, Grace
Harlowe's Overland Riders in the Great North
Woods, Grace Harlowe's Overland Riders in
the High Sierras, Grace Harlowe's Overland
Riders in the Yellowstone
National Park, etc., etc.

Illustrated

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I—AN UNLUCKY SHOT.	11
Emma Dean threatens to get "peevish." Stacy and Hippy go out in search of game, and meet with an adventure. The hunters are stalked by mysterious strangers. "It's a deer!" Mighty hunters make a disheartening discovery.	
CHAPTER II—A DOUBLE DISASTER.	18
"You poor fish! You've killed a cow." The guide agrees that Stacy Brown is "a daid shot." The owner of the dead cow suddenly appears in the Overland camp. Jim Oakley makes a claim. San Antone shoots their caller.	
CHAPTER III—BESET BY MYSTERIES.	26
"Tony! You are the suddenest person I ever knew," rebukes Emma. A mountaineer near death. A dear deer. Overlanders gain the Indian country. Strange tales told of the Hills. Stacy discovers the Man in Black. A warning of Indian spies drops into camp from the air.	
CHAPTER IV—THE VOICE IN THE SHADOWS.	37
"Down, everybody!" San Antone admits that he winged an Indian. A mysterious voice comes to the campers from the darkness. Stacy sees an aspen tree shake for the first time. Near the scene of an Indian massacre. Lieutenant Wingate and Stacy meet with an adventure in an Indian village.	

	PAGE
CHAPTER V — MISSING IN THE HILLS.	50
Overlanders go to the rescue of a "squaw-buck." The fat boy experiences a new thought. San Antone hears an amazing story. "You-all air shore in fer trouble now." Miss Dean sees the Man in Black. Grace and Elfreda are missing. A shot and a yell.	
CHAPTER VI — "I'M GOIN' TO KILL A MAN!"	59
Overland men search for the missing girls. The trail that was found and lost. San Antone utters forebodings. Evidences of a struggle are found. "The Indians took 'em away!" announces the guide. A wild ride through the night.	
CHAPTER VII — A NIGHT OF THRILLS.. . . .	66
What happened to Grace and Elfreda. A squaw utters a threat to kill. Captives take a grilling ride. The voice of a white man. Imprisoned in an old smelter. Screams that caused shivers. A shot and a wild dash for freedom.	
CHAPTER VIII — WHERE THE TRAIL LED.	77
Overland searchers fail. Following the trail of the Nomads of the Hills. The guide accuses the Indian chief. One minute to tell the truth! Chief Wild Tree gets a rap on the head. Grace and Elfreda again find themselves in the hands of the Indians. San Antone makes a dramatic entrance.	
CHAPTER IX — RED WOLF GIVES WARNING... . . .	94
"Stop! Oh, stop! You've killed him!" The return to camp. A visit from the "squaw-buck." The sign of peace. The Indian bows down before Lieutenant Wingate. A new name for the Overland Rider. Red Wolf appears to turn into a white man.	

	PAGE
CHAPTER X—ON THE TRAIL OF THE “Do-Do”	106
The Man in Black awakens in the Overland Camp.	
A geologist in search of the savage “Ippy Do-Do.”	
Professor Black gives warning of perils in the Hills.	
An odd farewell. “I’m goin’ to wing thet bird!”	
threatens San Antone.	
CHAPTER XI—“BUFFALO FACE HIM COME!”	112
Outwitted by the Man in Black. In the Deadwood	
gulches. Stacy has no use for tin. How to identify	
an Indian fire. Red Wolf makes an unexpected	
appearance with a stolen rifle. Overlanders are warned	
that Buffalo Face is on his way to them.	
CHAPTER XII—A RED MAN’S GRATITUDE.	119
The Indian chief wants “Big Medicine.” Hunting-	
braves means trouble for someone. Why Emma dis-	
likes the Hills. The strategy of Red Wolf. The warn-	
ing found at the spring. “Keep your guns loaded	
and your feet warm.” The smoke-signals of Sundance	
Mountain.	
CHAPTER XIII—STACY “SPILLS THE BEANS”	131
A long ride through the fragrant night. Red Wolf	
appears and adds to the mysterious warning. Over-	
landers head for the Indian Agency. A call at the	
Elk Horn Ranch. The real owner of Stacy’s cow de-	
mands payment for her death.	
CHAPTER XIV—THE GATHERING OF THE BRAVES.	139
The Riders arrive at the Indian Agency. A scene to	
be remembered. Hippy Wingate doctors a sick cow	
for a squaw. Stacy declines to hold the animal’s head.	
Emma Dean confuses the fat boy. San Antone feels	
“cut up.”	

	PAGE
CHAPTER XV — STACY CHARMS "MOON FACE"	150
Indians gather for the council and the dance. Squaws overwhelm Big Medicine with sick animals. "Buffalo Face is here!" The fat boy in a panic. "How you make so big like bear?" cooes the Indian maiden. Stacy arouses the Indians. "Look out for his knife!" cries Emma.	
CHAPTER XVI — AROUND THE COUNCIL FIRE.	160
San Antone shoots from the hip. "Now you have done it!" Overland Riders attend the Indian Council. The war priest calls the meeting to order. The pipe of peace. Stacy expresses his opinion out loud. A sensation in the making.	
CHAPTER XVII — HIPPY RESENTS AN INSULT.	168
Chief Chetwoot voices the red man's complaint. Overlanders are ordered to leave the medicine lodge. Lieutenant Wingate's silence confirms the Indian's suspicion. Buffalo Face makes a sudden attack. A big chief comes to grief.	
CHAPTER XVIII — "BIG MEDICINE! BIG WARRIOR!"	177
Hippy acts in self-defense. Insult added to injury. "A knife! A knife!" Chief Buffalo breaks the pledge of peace. Overlanders refuse to incriminate Red Wolf. Stacy begs the Indian Agent to lock up Moon Face. A screech and a sudden commotion awaken the Overlanders.	
CHAPTER XIX — THE THRUST THAT FAILED.	189
The tragedy in Lieutenant Wingate's tent. "Get help!" Indians menace the Overland camp. "The White Medicine is bad medicine!" San Antone takes a hand. Strange doings on the Indian reservation. The Acting Agent makes a startling announcement.	

	PAGE
CHAPTER XX—THE DANCE IN THE OMAHA HOUSE.	198
Miss Briggs gains some information. Red Wolf almost makes a confession. The feast of the fatted dog. Stacy Brown loses his appetite. The fat boy joins in the savage dance. Moon Face makes a mysterious visit to the Overland camp.	
CHAPTER XXI—PERIL FACES THE OVERLANDERS.	214
Moon Face gives warning. The Overland Riders take a hurried departure. Signal smokes are sighted. "Make a sound and I'll kill ye!" warns a voice in Lieutenant Wingate's ear.	
CHAPTER XXII—HELD UP IN THE HILLS.	221
White men get the drop on the Overland Riders. San Antone meets his match. Emma asserts her right to have the last word. "You'll be shot afore ye git ten paces!" Mystery in the miner's cabin.	
CHAPTER XXIII—THE RED MAN'S REVENGE.	230
A letter from a mysterious friend causes another hurried departure. In a deserted city. Stacy appoints himself chief of police. The mystery of the haunted mill. Red Wolf brings warning of approaching trouble.	
CHAPTER XXIV—THE FLAMING ARROW.	241
The Overlanders prepare for defense. Fire set from the air. The Riders are attacked by Indians. Red Wolf makes the supreme sacrifice. Professor Black finds the "Ippy Do-Do."	

GRACE HARLOWE'S OVER- LAND RIDERS IN THE BLACK HILLS

CHAPTER I

AN UNLUCKY SHOT

“**M**R. BENNETT, don't you think it is about time that our men folks went out and rustled some game?” questioned Grace Harlowe, addressing the Overland Riders' guide.

“I shore do, Mrs. Gray,” drawled the guide. “There's plenty of it 'round heah, too; but please jest drop the ‘Mister.’ I'm San Antone in these parts, an' I ain't used to hevin' a handle tucked onto my name. Somehow thet name Bennett don't seem to fit me. Nobody's called me thet since I was a youngster.”

“San Antone,” murmured Emma Dean. “That surely is a beautiful name. It is so musical, and I like it. Don't you think it is fine, San Antone?”

The guide flushed and hitched his revolver belt.

"I — I reckon it is, Miss — leastwise, it is the way you-all say it," he mumbled blushing, avoiding the teasing eyes of the little Overland girl.

The Overlanders laughed heartily at the guide's evident embarrassment.

"Don't tease Mr. — San Antone," admonished Elfreda Briggs. "Later on, after he gets to know you, perhaps he won't mind it."

"Won't mind it?" demanded Emma, elevating her freckled nose. "Of course he will. He will like it even more. If he doesn't I shall be real peeved. I promise you that the farther we go on this journey the more he will like to be teased. Isn't that right, Tony?"

The Overlanders groaned, and the guide, too confused to reply, grinned sheepishly.

"You had better," warned Emma, placing a warning finger on the guide's arm and gazing up mischievously into his disturbed eyes.

Grace turned a laughing face to her husband.

"Emma hasn't reformed since our last season's journey to the Yellowstone, has she, Tom?" queried Grace.

"You didn't expect her to change, did you?" answered Tom with a shake of the head.

"I would have you good people know that I am doing my best to follow the example set for

me by my companions," retorted Emma with spirit.

"That's right, Emma," agreed Stacy Brown, known more familiarly to his companions as Chunky, the fat boy. "You devote your teasing attentions to San Antonio. He is so easy he doesn't dare say his soul is his own, and doesn't dare to talk back to you the way I do. Perhaps I shall have some peace on this trip, for which much thanks."

"Come, Stacy! Let's get going and see if we can rustle some game for this company," urged Lieutenant Hippy Wingate. "We are the official hunters for the Overland Riders on this journey through the Hills."

"Yes. The mightiest hunters of the Hills," agreed Stacy, picking up his rifle and examining it to make certain that the magazine was full. "What shall it be, folks, deer, bear or mountain lion? Name your favorite meat and we will see that you have it."

Nora Wingate called to her husband to take good care of Stacy and see that he did not get into trouble, and the two hunters waved their hands in farewell as they strode from camp.

Following the departure of the hunters, the rest of the Overland party began setting their camp to rights. It was the early afternoon of their second day in the saddle, now on their regu-

lar summer's outing, and with Beale Bennett, better known as "San Antone," as their guide, they had begun their journey into the historic Black Hills of South Dakota.

The Hills had been selected for the Overland Riders' summer journey because they promised a fertile field for adventure. Since their service in the World War they had taken their vacations in the saddle, meeting with many stirring experiences, first in riding the Old Apache Trail, then on the Great American Desert, in the Sierras, among the fighting Kentucky mountaineers, and on many a perilous western trail. They were now on their way to answer to the call of the Hills, where the savage Sioux had made bloody history. There was romance, there were adventure and thrilling experiences awaiting them there, as the guide whom they had engaged at Minnekahta Springs had promised them that there would be.

In the guide the Overlanders felt that they had a real find. San Antone, though a Texan by birth, knew the country and its ways, and his slow, easy, cool speech both pleased and inspired confidence. His voice with its quaint southern drawl was almost womanly in its gentleness, but there was that in the eyes now and again, a glint, a flash that faded as instantaneously as it came, that warned the observant that the man's

gentle exterior was a mask for the steel that lay beneath. Emma Dean characterized the glint as San Antone's "keep-off-the-grass" sign.

Emma, finding that her mischievous teasing embarrassed the guide, missed no favorable opportunity for chaffing him, and while they were putting the camp in order she kept up a continuous chatter, mostly directed at San Antone.

While all this was taking place, Lieutenant Wingate and Stacy Brown were cautiously creeping along a granite dike in the Hills a short distance from camp, and they might have been Indian scouts for all the disturbance they created. Above them the rocks towered high on one side, on the other a series of low, rugged peaks, typical Black Hills mountain scenery, stretched out for fully two miles. Both men were hatless.

"See anything, Uncle Hip?" questioned Stacy in a low tone.

"No. Keep quiet."

"I can't. I've kept still so long that I've simply got to say something or I'll blow up."

Lieutenant Wingate shrugged his shoulders in disapproval, and half turned his head to see what his companion was about.

"Chunky, have you the safety lock on your gun?" he demanded.

"No, of course not. I am ready to shoot," answered the fat boy.

"Then be good enough to keep that gun pointed in some other direction than towards me. First thing you know you will be sending a bullet through me. Furthermore, you will scare away every deer on the range. I am certain that I caught a glimpse of a black-tail over yonder a few moments ago."

"Then why didn't you shoot?" demanded Stacy.

"Too quick for me," answered Hippy in a whisper. "I don't believe he saw us, but he may have caught our scent. Now keep very quiet. Surely you don't wish to return to camp without any game and let the girls have a laugh at our expense, do you?"

"I don't care how much they laugh, but I guess, now that I have had my say, I can keep quiet for a little while."

They had continued on for nearly half an hour longer without sighting further game, when a smothered exclamation from his companion caused Hippy to glance back quickly. At that instant Stacy fired, the reverberating crashes of the report echoing from peak to peak for several seconds.

"I got him! I got him!" yelled Chunky, leaping to his feet.

"What is it?"

"It's a deer! I reckon the folks won't have the

laugh on us. We know how to get game, eh? What?" Stacy started clambering up the side of the mountain to the point in a heavy growth of foliage where he had seen and shot the deer.

About this time two men, raising their heads from behind the rocks on the opposite side of the granite dike, cautiously observed the Overlanders hurriedly running towards Stacy's kill. The same two men had been stalking the Overlanders for a full half hour, but Hippy and Stacy had been too absorbed in their quest for game to look for mere humans.

"There he is!" shouted Stacy, reaching the scene first. "I told you —" The fat boy's voice trailed off into a gurgle, ending in a gasp.

"What's this?" demanded Lieutenant Wingate.

"I — I — I thought it was a deer."

Before their amazed eyes lay a cow. Stacy's shot had killed her.

CHAPTER II

A DOUBLE DISASTER

“**Y**OU poor fish! You have killed a cow,”
raged Hippy. “Don’t you know the
difference between a cow and a deer?”

“Of — of course I — I do, but —”

“Well? But what?”

“All I could see was her back, which looked brown and sleek just like a deer,” protested Stacy. “You would have shot, too, under those circumstances. What business had that cow fooling around here and trying to look like a deer, anyway?”

“Someone owns this animal, Stacy, and when he finds out who did the killing he will request us to settle. I reckon you will have to pay up.”

“I reckon I won’t,” objected the fat boy stubbornly.

“Come! We will go back to camp. I have had enough of hunting with you until you learn to distinguish a deer from a cow,” announced Hippy after examining the brand on the animal’s hip.

"Aren't you going to take the critter with us?"

"I am not," answered Lieutenant Wingate. "The shooting was accidental. Taking the cow to camp would be appropriating what doesn't belong to us."

The two men turned campward, Stacy grumbling, Hippy Wingate grinning and scowling in turn, still observed by the pair that had been a witness to the shooting. Half an hour later Hippy and Stacy walked into camp, the fat boy trailing along behind, neither one particularly happy over the prospect before them.

The two men who had been stalking the Overlanders followed them nearly to the camp before finally turning back into the Hills.

"I say, where is the game?" called Tom Gray.

"In the Hills," answered Stacy sourly.

"We heard a shot fired, and as there was no second shot we took for granted that the first shot was a hit," said Grace Harlowe. "So you did not kill anything?"

"I didn't. Stacy did," replied Lieutenant Wingate.

"What did you get, little boy?" questioned Emma Dean sweetly.

"He shot and killed a cow, that's all," grumbled Hippy. "He thought it was a deer. Can you beat it?"

"I could do no worse than that myself," in-

terjected Emma; then the Overland Riders burst out laughing.

"Thet shore was goin' some," averred the guide, grinning broadly. "Whar is the critter?"

Hippy told him and San Antone said he would have a look at the animal before they left that camp.

"I suppose this means that we shall have to pay the owner of the cow, does it not?" questioned Miss Briggs.

"Yes, of course, provided we can find the owner," agreed Grace.

"Did you-all get the brand on the critter?" questioned San Antone in an indifferent drawl.

"Yes. 'E. K.' in a circle," replied Hippy.

"Wal, I don't reckon as I know thet brand. The daid cow probably has wandered a long way from home an' it ain't likely thet we'll ever hear from her owner."

"Tony, don't you think our Stacy is a fine shot?" teased Emma.

"A daid shot," nodded the guide soberly, whereupon the Overlanders teased and chaffed and nagged the fat boy until Stacy, red of face and angry, sought refuge in his tent, where he sulked for more than an hour, listening attentively to what was being said about him by his companions.

After some sober discussion it was decided that

inquiries should be made as to the owners of the "E. K." brand and every effort made to find them and pay for the killing of the cow. That was all that the Overlanders could think of doing in the matter.

"We ought to have some meat to cure and take along with us," reminded Tom. "I think I will go out myself and see what I can do."

The guide suggested that they wait until the next day, when, he said, they would be moving in a direction where game was certain to be more plentiful. The party was still discussing the food question when a hail interrupted them.

"Hulloa the camp!" shouted a voice.

"Come in," called Hippy and Tom in chorus.

A man, armed with a rifle, who presented the appearance of a typical mountaineer, entered the camp.

"How'dy, folks," he greeted, leaning his rifle against a rock. "Who be ye? My name's Swinton."

"We are known as the Overland Riders, now riding the Black Hills for pleasure," replied Tom Gray. "Won't you sit down?"

"Don't reckon as I kin. I'm lookin' fer a strayed cow that got away from my place over on Black Creek. I follered the critter's trail till a piece back, then lost it, and I reckoned that mebby you folks had seen her 'bout here."

The Overlanders exchanged significant glances.

"Describe the animal, please," requested Lieutenant Wingate.

"Brown critter, sleek and slim and can run like a deer."

"Did she hev a brand?" drawled San Antone.

"Yes. 'E. K. Circle' brand. I got her in a round-up sale and took her to my place, but she run away and was headed back to her ranch. That's the worst of the critters. They're crazy to git back home."

"Mr. Swinton, I think we can tell you about your cow," spoke up Hippy. "One of our party shot a cow this afternoon, thinking it was a deer. From your description I think it must have been the animal for which you are in search. Should it prove to be the same animal we, of course, will pay you, and from your description I don't think there is any doubt about her being your property. What is she worth?"

"Wal, the critter cost me thirty dollar, and I ought ter have ten bucks more for my trouble," answered the man.

"I'll pay it," decided Hippy.

The money was counted out to the caller, who thanked the Overlanders, and, after assuring them that there were no hard feelings on his part, took his leave. During all this Stacy

Brown remained in his tent from which he peered large-eyed, but, after the departure of the visitor, he came out.

"Aren't you going to reimburse your Uncle Hip?" questioned Emma sweetly.

"I am not. I didn't tell him to pay for the cow, did I?" retorted Stacy. "I —"

"Someone is coming," warned Grace.

A horseman, booted and spurred, at this juncture trotted into the camp, and halting, angrily surveyed the Overland outfit. After a moment of keen scrutiny, he got down, casting the bridle-rein over the pommel of his saddle.

"Wal, what do you-all reckon you-all want?" drawled San Antone.

"You, feller," he growled, addressing Hippy. "You shot a critter back yonder a piece. What about it?"

"You are mistaken. I did not shoot any 'critter,'" objected Lieutenant Wingate.

"Don't lie to me! I seen you do it."

"Stranger! Did I heah you-all say 'lie'?" demanded the cool voice of San Antone. "Did I heah you-all say thet?" The guide was smiling and his voice held a gentle, purring note.

"I said I seen him do it, and I want pay fer that critter right quick or I'll have the law on ye."

"Please keep out of this, Guide," ordered Tom

Gray. "Do you own the animal you speak of?"

"Naw, I don't. I'm the assistant foreman of the E. K. Ranch and I been sent out to look for a stray cow. I was makin' Squaw Peak on the other side of the gulch back yonder when I seen two fellers creepin' along the dike, and then I seen one of 'em shoot. I seen 'em go 'way, so I went over and found what they'd shot. It was the critter I was out lookin' for. That's all there is to it, except the settlin', fer you was one of them fellers."

"What's your name, Stranger?" asked the guide gently.

"Jim Oakley, and I'm the assistant foreman of the Elkhorn Ranch."

"How long hev you-all been thet?" persisted San Antone.

"'Bout a year, if you got to know."

"Stranger, you-all git out o' heah hot foot. Don't want to see nothin' but yer back an' only 'bout a minute of thet," answered San Antone in his easy, cool speech.

"I'll go when I git good and ready," blazed the man.

"You-all will go now, even if I hev to hawg-tie you an' pack you-all out of heah on a hoss."

"Tony, Tony! Don't forget yourself," begged Emma Dean.

“I don’t believe that critter belongs to your outfit at all,” continued the guide, giving no heed to Emma’s words. “Air you goin’ to mosey out of heah?”

“I’m goin’ when I git my pay fer the cow an’ not a minute before, an’ ye can’t bluff me out neither.”

“You-all air a cheap crook, that’s what you-all are. And that ain’t all. You ain’t the assistant foreman of the Elkhorn; you-all ain’t Jim Oakley, and you ain’t nothin’ but what I said. Get out of heah a-jumpin’! You’re a liar an’ you-all know it!” finished the guide.

The stranger’s hand flew to his holster, but did not reach it. San Antone’s hand reached his weapon first. A flash and a sharp report, as the guide drew and fired from the hip, were followed by a yell from “Jim Oakley.” San Antone’s bullet had gone through the man’s hand as he reached for his own revolver.

CHAPTER III

BESET BY MYSTERIES

SO suddenly had the shooting occurred that the Overlanders could scarcely credit what their eyes had barely seen. What they did see clearly, however, was the expression of ferocity on the face of San Antonio, and the hand that was nervously fingering the revolver that he still held at his side.

The stranger was holding his injured hand, raging and threatening, when Emma laid a hand on the guide's revolver.

"Put it back, Tony!" she commanded. "My gracious, but you are the suddenest person I ever knew. Put your gun back, I say."

San Antone hesitated, then, guided by the hand of the little Overland Rider, slowly jammed his weapon into its holster.

"I can get it if I need it," he muttered, his face assuming a grin that had nothing of merriment in it, his eyes never leaving the face of the man he had shot.

"Jim Oakley," whose revolver had dropped

from his hand, was rocking back and forth and each second edging closer to the weapon that lay on the ground in plain sight of all. All at once he made a grab for it with his left hand.

San Antone's hand flashed to his holster. At the same instant Emma fastened a firm grip on his wrist.

"Stop, I say!" she commanded.

San Antone hesitated for the barest fraction of a second, then permitted his hand to drop to his side. It might have been otherwise had it not been for Elfreda Briggs who stood near the stranger during the entire affair. Elfreda saw what the wounded mountaineer was up to, and at the moment when the man made his grab for the weapon she sprang forward and kicked it beyond his reach. Elfreda then snatched up the weapon and ejected all the cartridges from it, after which she threw the revolver on the ground.

"Oakley," enraged and mad with pain, aimed a vicious kick at her. That kick, had it landed, would have sealed his death warrant, for San Antone this time jerked his own weapon clear of its holster, despite Emma's efforts to prevent his doing so.

"That will do, Bennett!" commanded Hippy, springing between the two men, facing San Antone. "We have had quite enough shooting for one day. I can't shoot with you, but I sure can

wallop you with my fists, and I'll do it, too, if you don't behave yourself."

"I nevah could fight," drawled the guide, returning his revolver to its receptacle, "but if you-all don't send thet houn' away mebbly I can't hold myself," he added.

"Get out of here!" ordered Tom Gray to the stranger. "You know what you will get if you don't go."

"Wait!" begged Grace. "The man may need attention."

"Let me dress the wound in your hand," offered Elfreda.

"Don't you touch me. I'll have the law on you, every one of you, and I'll see to it that the whole bunch gits run out of these Hills. Do I git pay fer that cow?"

"Mister Man. The only thing you will 'get' is get out," warned Tom Gray sternly. "On your way!"

"Oakley" flung himself into his saddle and rode away as fast as his mount would carry him.

"Has that violent stranger gone?" called Stacy Brown from his tent.

"Yes, little boy. You can come out now with perfect safety," answered Emma.

"Mr. Bennett, I hope you will not lose your temper again while you are with this outfit," rebuked Tom Gray.

"Tom, he had to shoot or that fellow would have killed him," defended Grace. "Emma, I am proud of you. You were the only member of this party to keep her head. I suggest that we have dinner now. Mr. Bennett, if you will build the fire I will cook the evening meal. The rest of the outfit have done their full duty, including Stacy, who shot and killed a 'deer,' " added Grace laughingly.

"A dear deer, I call it," interposed Emma Dean. "We have paid for it once and came near paying for it a second time, which we surely should have done had not Tony discovered that the man was an impostor. Tony, how did you suspect that that fellow wasn't Oakley?"

"'Cause I've seen Jim Oakley. We'll stop in and tell Jim 'bout the cayuse that tried to collect from us, when we get up his way. I shore ought to hev killed the critter," purred the guide.

"Mr. Bennett, were you always this way?" wondered Nora Wingate.

San Antone, now busily engaged in laying the cooking fire, made no reply, and curiosity, not unmixed with admiration, was plainly to be seen in the eyes of the Overland Riders as they regarded the guide. After dinner they discussed their coming journey, then turned in for the night, wondering over the gentleness and the savagery of the man who was to guide them through the Hills.

Next morning the party broke camp early and rode out through an arroyo through which a small stream of water flowed, enclosed between high rugged palisades, surmounted by tall pines. After proceeding a few miles through the arroyo the rocky walls on either side began to broaden and rise, then gradually flattened out until the party found themselves on a thickly wooded plateau, strangely wild and lonely.

"This air Indian country," San Antone informed his charges. "I wonder that we ain't seen any of the redskins before this. Most always you can see their smoke. I reckon they must be up to somethin' at the reservation."

"Indians?" exclaimed Emma apprehensively. "Are there Indians here?"

"Yes. Sioux. The Agency is at Pine Ridge, whar we're goin' to stop. Mebby we'll find somethin' doin' there. Either the Indians don't want us to see 'em or they've gone to the Agency for some doin's."

"But surely the Sioux are no longer savage," protested Nora.

"There's good Indians an' bad Indians. Some of them is good farmers, and others air — wal, jest Sioux, especially since the moonshiners come up into this heah country."

"Moonshiners? That sounds like Kentucky," smiled Grace.

“Plenty of ’em, an’ the revenue officers don’t ketch many of ’em either. I reckon the Indians is to blame fer that.”

As the Overlanders progressed, flocks of blue-birds, alarmed at the approach of strangers, rose with a loud whir, vanishing in the velvet tops of the tall pines. Ahead, a series of granite peaks reared high in the air. The largest of these the guide explained was known as “Calamity Jane.”

“’Thar’s another Calamity Jane, a real one, in these Hills,” he added. “They say she’s a wild creature an’ thet now an’ then she goes to Deadwood with a little bag of gold dust that she gets, nobody knows whar. She goes back into the Hills then an’ mebbly ain’t seen again fer months.”

“I hope she doesn’t do any calamity howling about our outfit,” declared Stacy.

“You-all won’t see her. We’ll be gettin’ on now to the place whar we’re goin’ to camp.”

Shortly after three o’clock that afternoon the Overlanders rode out on a vast plain of rugged granite dikes, that, under certain lights, resembled a city of spires. For a few moments after the arrival of the party the sun shone down brilliantly on these spires set in frames of vivid green; then the clouds blotted out the unusual scene and the Overland Riders began pitching camp. Stacy, however, had promptly wandered away to avoid having to work, and the afternoon being warm,

he finally sat down with his back against a rock and was soon fast asleep.

Stacy awakened late in the afternoon with a start. Twilight was almost upon him, but it was yet light enough to enable him quite clearly to distinguish objects some distance away. He suddenly realized what it was that had awakened him. A distant tapping sound was now borne to his ears, as if someone was hammering on a rock.

The Overland boy's eyes widened. Some little distance from him he discovered a man wielding a hammer against a rock, a huge slab of granite that reared itself from the ground some twenty feet into the air, and he wondered if the stranger were trying to break down the granite slab and why.

Dressed entirely in black with a long Prince Albert coat reaching below the knees, a roofless straw hat on his head, and wearing huge rimmed dark spectacles, the stranger presented an unusual and somewhat ludicrous appearance. The boy watched wonderingly for some moments, then, getting up and taking a step forward, he shouted, "Hulloa there!" At that instant Stacy stubbed his toe and measured his length on the ground.

On his feet again in an instant, the fat boy stood blinking, gazing at the spot where the man in black had been standing. The stranger had disappeared and with his disappearance the tapping had ceased.

"Oh, wow!" exclaimed the fat boy starting at a run for the camp. "Maybe I have seen a ghost." Twilight had settled over the hills by the time he dashed into camp.

"Where have you been, young man?" demanded Emma severely.

"Out — out yonder, and I saw, I saw a man and — I want my dinner!"

"We finished dinner an hour ago," replied Emma.

"You are a fine lot of friends, you are!"

"Stacy, there is still coffee in the pot, but it must be cold by now. We waited for you so long that we had to eat a nearly cold dinner," Grace informed him. "What was it that you said about seeing a man?"

"Oh, nothing much," mumbled the boy, fussing about looking for something to eat. He found some hard biscuit, then, stirring the dying cook-fire until it sent up a great smudge, he banged the coffee pot down in the middle of it, where the pot was soon blackened with soot. Stacy then arranged the biscuit in a row on his blanket and eyed them ruefully, all observed with keen interest by the other Overlanders.

"You aren't much of a dinner, but I am going to eat you just for spite," soliloquized the fat boy, addressing the biscuit.

The coffee pot now began to steam, whereupon the boy poured out a cupful and tasted of it.

"This coffee tastes like a smokehouse. Try it and see if it doesn't, Emma."

"Never having eaten a smokehouse, I fear my decision would be of no use to you. Perhaps Mr. Bennett might assist you. Tony, did you ever eat a smokehouse?" asked Emma without the suspicion of a smile on her face.

"I nevah did, Miss Dean," answered the guide with equal gravity, whereupon the Overlanders gave way to their merriment.

Stacy hied a biscuit at a squirrel that whisked down a near-by tree trunk, poured the coffee on the ground and hunched himself down in a sulk until Nora laughingly came to the rescue.

"Be a nice boy and I will fry you some bacon and make fresh coffee," she promised.

"Bacon for a child!" cried Emma in mock horror. "Are you crazy?"

"What we wish to know is who the man is that Stacy saw," reminded Tom Gray.

"How do I know? I never saw him before," answered the fat boy, then briefly gave them a description of the Man in Black.

The Overlanders turned inquiringly to San Antone, but the guide shook his head to indicate that he had no idea who the stranger might be.

"There's some queer ones floatin' 'bout these heah parts," he observed. "But I reckon we'd bettah find out 'bout thet critter. What do you-

all reckon thet feller was doin' ? ” he added, addressing Stacy Brown.

Stacy shook his head and helped himself to the bacon that Nora was frying. San Antone said he would see if he could pick up the fellow's trail in the morning. The words had barely passed his lips when something thudded lightly to the ground close to the fire. It startled the Overland Riders, and Nora started to pick up the object that had fallen almost at her feet.

“ Wait ! ” commanded Grace in a low, sharp tone. “ It is a stone with a piece of paper tied to it.”

San Antone hitched his belt nervously.

“ Do you-all reckon I'd bettah go out and see who fired thet stone at us ? ” he questioned.

“ No. Wait, but keep your ears open. I will get the stone as soon as I think it prudent to do so. Talk and laugh. Someone may be watching,” warned Grace. A few moments later she got up and casually strolled over to the fire. “ Drop the frying pan,” she whispered to Nora.

After an instant's hesitation Nora did, and an instant wail from the fat boy followed. Grace quickly picked up the pan and the stone at the same time, handing the pan to her companion, after which she returned to her former position and sat down. The stone now lay in her hat and there she removed the paper cover, the while

chatting with Elfreda Briggs. The paper contained a message and Grace barely escaped uttering an exclamation as she read it.

"What is it?" whispered Elfreda Briggs.

"A warning. Listen, folks, but be cautious. Here is something that I do not understand at all." Grace, in a low tone, then read the message that lay concealed in her hat:

"Your party has been under observation ever since you came into the Hills. First, two white men — Indians next. Two Indians are at this moment watching you from behind the granite rock due east of your camp. Be cautious, — be on the alert. I don't know what their game is, but I suspect," finished Grace. No name was signed to the message, which, probably having been written in the dark, was a scrawl.

"I reckon I'll get out of heah an' take a walk," drawled San Antone.

"Stay where you are, please!" commanded Tom Gray, stirring the fire and throwing on fresh fuel.

"Indians!" suddenly yelled Stacy Brown shrilly, leaping to his feet, overturning the coffee pot and scattering what was left of his bacon.

For an instant not a word was spoken, then the crash of San Antone's revolver woke the echoes, followed by a screech from the vicinity of the granite rock.

CHAPTER IV

THE VOICE IN THE SHADOWS

“**D**OWN, everybody!” commanded Tom Gray, fully expecting a return shot in answer to the one fired by San Antone, a shot that evidently found a human mark.

Hippy kicked the campfire to pieces, scattering the embers, over which he threw a blanket and stamped on it. The blanket suffered, but the camp was plunged into instant darkness.

“San Antone, where are you?” cried Emma.

“I’m heah, Miss Dean,” drawled the guide. “You-all better keep down. They’s redskins heah.”

“I saw ’em first!” announced Stacy with a note of boastfulness in his tone. “I saw two of ’em peeking over that rock that the fellow wrote to us about.”

“Be silent!” commanded Hippy sternly. “Do you want to get a bullet through your head? If you do, keep on talking, and you will get your wish. Guide, why did you shoot?”

"I reckon I shoots first an' talks 'bout it when the other feller can't shoot back. I winged an Indian, thet's all. I didn't shoot to kill the critter. I don't reckon there's more'n two or three of 'em, but you folks better get your guns ready in case we hev any trouble. All you keep on this side 'cause if I heah a sound anywhere else I'll shoot at it right smart," drawled San Antone. All this conversation was carried on in a low tone of voice, for no one knew what a loud word might draw down upon him.

The Overland girls were whispering, and their whispers sounded loud in the tense silence of the camp. Following the screech, presumably the result of the guide's shot, not a movement nor a sound had been heard outside the camp. San Antone knew where his bullet had hit the victim, knew that it had raked the side of the copper-skinned face that showed momentarily in the light of the campfire, just above the granite rock that the mysterious writer had spoken of. The guide was too sure a shot to have any doubts as to where his bullet had caught the imprudent Indian.

"Uncle Hip, may I light a match?" asked Stacy in a loud tone. "I want to see what time it is."

Lieutenant Wingate laid a sudden and heavy hand on the collar of Stacy's blouse.

"It's bedtime for you, young man," hissed Hippy. "Turn in! If I hear another loud word from you I'll thrash you right here, even if I am shot in doing it. Get into your tent."

"Hippy, please control yourself. Remember, Stacy is a mere child. We are taught that children should not be punished in anger," reminded Emma.

"I'll show you whether or not I'm a chi — " Stacy did not finish his sentence for the very good reason that Lieutenant Wingate was propelling the young man towards his tent in a series of jerks and shakes that took all the speech out of him.

Not a sound was heard from the rest of the party during this chastisement. The situation was too serious for levity, and every ear was strained to catch the slightest sound that might indicate further peril for the Overland party.

For fully a quarter of an hour did the Overlanders remain flat on the ground, then there occurred an interruption that caused every Overland nerve to jump painfully. The interruption was the sound of a human voice, deep, resonant and commanding, coming from somewhere among the trees at one side of the camp.

"The Indians have departed!" announced the voice.

"Who said that?" demanded Tom Gray.

"I said, the Indians have gone," repeated the

voice. "They will trouble you no more to-night, but watch out and —"

"Stranger, come out an' show yourself. If you-all ain't out after I count ten I'll shoot," drawled San Antone.

"Don't do it, San Antone. Your bullets cannot touch me," answered the mysterious voice.

"Tony, you do just as he tells you to. That's a nice boy," urged Emma.

"As I was about to suggest, watch out," resumed the mysterious voice. "There are those in these Hills who are observing and who, for good reason, would be pleased to see the Overland Riders come to grief. Suspect everyone, and beware of the roving Sioux."

"Who are you, sir?" called Grace Harlowe.

"A man among men. I bid you good-night."

"I'll find thet feller," growled the guide, springing forward.

"Keep your gun in its holster," commanded Lieutenant Wingate sternly.

San Antone made no reply, but dashed out in search of the owner of the voice. The Overlanders heard him threshing about in the bushes, uttering threats in his drawling voice, to which there was no answer. After a fruitless search the guide returned to camp.

"I'll pick up thet critter's trail an' run him down to-morrow mornin'," he threatened.

“How strange,” cried Nora Wingate. “Who can that queer man be?”

“Why should we be concerned about that? He is a white man and plainly a friend,” replied Miss Briggs.

“Have they all gone?” called Stacy from his tent.

“Yes, child. Go to sleep,” soothed Emma. “Tony,” she added, turning to the guide. “You are a gentle soul, aren’t you?”

The Overlanders, now that the strain was relaxed, laughed, and after consultation it was decided to build a fresh campfire. It was a small fire that they started, just sufficient to relieve the blackness of the night, and after it was well going, San Antone strolled out into the night, making several circuits of the camp in an ever-widening circle. He returned after half an hour’s scouting, stepping so quietly that his approach was unheard by the Overland Riders.

“I reckon you folks better turn in an’ get some rest,” he said. “I’ll watch out thet no Indians bothers this outfit to-night.”

Despite these assurances the members of the party spent a somewhat restless night. San Antone did not turn in at all, but crept about or sat outside the camp the whole night through.

The party made a late start next day. For two days they continued on without incident, sight-

ing neither game nor human beings, though all were especially on the alert for the latter, then one morning they rode into the town of Custer. They found nothing of interest there, and after purchasing necessary supplies rode away late in the afternoon, soon finding themselves in a forest made up of tall spruce, some fir, clumps of willows and a young growth of birch and aspen. Stacy eyed the aspen tree inquiringly.

"I don't see it shake," he said.

"How shake?" questioned the guide.

"Didn't you ever hear of folks shaking like an aspen leaf?" demanded the fat boy.

"The way Mr. Brown shook when he saw the Indians," reminded Emma.

The guide grinned and gave the tree a kick, and instantly all the leaves started a-quivering.

"That's the idea. Now I know how an aspen leaf does shake. It is just the way I shook when I had the chills and fever on a trip with the Pony Rider Boys. Where are we at?"

"Custer Park," the guide informed him. "I reckon it don't look much like the parks you folks have seen," he added with a grin.

Camp was made that afternoon in the great park that bore the name of the unfortunate general who fell in an Indian massacre with his entire command. The Overlanders were familiar with the history of that terrible slaughter, familiar

with the location where the battle was fought, so far as reading could inform them. They were at some distance from the battleground, however, and had no intention of visiting it on this trip.

It was decided to remain in the park for a day or so, explore it and do some hunting, for the party had not shot a single piece of game thus far. After a good night's rest the Overlanders arose refreshed and ready for whatever might be in store for them. After a consultation at breakfast it was decided that hunting should be the order of the day, but Stacy, Lieutenant Wingate and Grace, with Elfreda Briggs, were the only ones who cared to go out. Emma and Nora complained that they were lame from riding, and Tom Gray averred that he preferred to go out "prospecting."

The four Overlanders started away, Grace and Elfreda laughing and chattering, without regard to the disturbance they were creating.

"Say! Are you two going to be with us all day?" demanded Stacy. "If you are, we had better carry marbles than rifles. You will scare all the game out of the Hills."

"At least they will know enough not to shoot some rancher's cow," Emma called after them.

"Be careful that you don't get lost," admonished San Antone, who had followed them out to point out certain landmarks to the hunters.

“Keep thet high granite peak over yonder in sight. When you see the white splotches you’ll know you’re on this side of it. Behind the camp is a straight black peak. Head fer thet and you’ll be all right. If you get lost shoot three times, one long and a short space between shots. Good luck!”

“I propose to strike off to the northwest,” finally announced Hippy after they had progressed some distance from camp. “It looks wild off that way and there is better cover for stalking game. What do you girls propose to do?”

“Why, we thought we would try those ridges to the right of us. They, too, look promising for game,” answered Grace.

“Good! Go over there and sit down in the shade of the old aspen trees. Leave the hunting to us men,” urged Stacy. “The deer on your side will be safe.”

A few moments later the two parties were out of sight of each other. Up to noon, however, Hippy and Stacy had sighted no game at all. They sat down beside a stream to eat the luncheon they had brought along, and while eating a distant rifle shot echoed faintly among the Hills. It was followed by a second shot.

“That may have been fired by one of the girls,” announced Lieutenant Wingate. “The first shot evidently missed. I hope the second one landed.

Stacy, you and I have got to make good to-day. It never will do to let Grace and Elfreda beat us out."

"They won't. Don't worry," answered Stacy.

The two men once more started forward, talking in low tones, and as they progressed the scene grew wilder, but no game appeared. Suddenly Lieutenant Wingate threw up a warning hand and stood listening.

"What is it, Uncle Hip?" whispered Stacy.

"I thought I heard someone yelling. Yes! There it goes again."

"I hear it, but I call it screeching, not yelling. It sounds just like the screech that Indian let out when San Antone shot him the other night," observed Stacy.

The "yelling" soon grew into a distant uproar.

"Come on!" shouted Hippy, sprinting away, followed by his companion. "Something surely is going on, and we may be able to stir up a little excitement."

The uproar increased in volume as they ran on, and the pair had not proceeded far ere Hippy saw a spiral of thin smoke curling up ahead of them. He slowed down instantly, at the same time cautioning his companion to keep quiet until they discovered what the trouble was. They crept along cautiously for some distance.

"It's Indians, all right," volunteered Stacy.

"White folks couldn't make a racket like that, nor —"

"Sh-h-h-h!" Lieutenant Wingate had parted the bushes and was peering through. He beckoned to Stacy to come up beside him.

"I told you it was Indians," breathed Chunky in an awed tone as he gazed on the scene before them.

"Nomads of the Hills. A roving band of Sioux Indians," muttered Hippy. "Look! They're trying to kill that squaw!" he exclaimed.

"We can't stop it, can we?" demanded Stacy. "If they want to, they'll probably do it. I'm for getting out of here hot foot."

"Yes we can, too!" raged Lieutenant Wingate.

Before the pair lay a small Indian village of a dozen or more tepees, with smoldering fires scattered about. Dogs were barking, children running about in play, and braves were lounging about the camp indolently at ease.

But this was not what stirred the ire and the fighting blood of Lieutenant Hippy Wingate. One whom he took to be a squaw was being unmercifully beaten and buffeted about by a group of squaws and stripling bucks. The woman was being mauled with fists, struck with clubs and violently kicked by moccasined feet, while the air was filled with ugly yells and screeches of rage. It was like a scene from a hideous nightmare, and

Hippy Wingate, reared in all the ideals of chivalry to womanhood, was quivering with righteous indignation.

"They surely *will* kill her!" breathed Stacy.

"Not if we can prevent it. Come along!" snapped Hippy, striding boldly into the Indian village.

Beyond a few curious glances, from lounging redskins, the pair at first attracted little attention. The rest of the village was too fully occupied with its attack on the woman, and the beating of the squaw went on.

"She's down!" cried Stacy.

"No! She's up again," answered Lieutenant Wingate, making the sign of peace that he had learned from an Indian in the Great North Woods.

Down went the squaw, whereupon her attackers began hurling stones at the prostrate figure.

"Here, here! Stop that!" shouted Lieutenant Wingate. Even in that uproar, his voice carried to everyone in the village.

The attackers paused and regarded the intruders with scowling countenances.

"How!" said Hippy, again making the sign of peace.

"Ho!" answered a buck. "Who you?"

"Strangers in the Hills. We have a party near here. I wish to know why you are abusing

that woman. You know that sort of thing doesn't go these days, even with Indians."

"Him squaw."

"I know that. But why?"

"Him squaw."

"This is the first time I ever heard that a squaw was a him," observed Chunky, regarding the scene with wide eyes. "You let her alone! What has she done?"

"Heap tenderfoot squaw," grunted the Indian.

"You let her alone or we will report you to the Agency at Pine Ridge," threatened Hippy.

"Does the agent allow you to beat your squaws?"

There was no reply, but bucks, squaws, dogs and children began drawing in on the intruders. The dogs sniffed suspiciously at the calves of the two white men, snapped and drew back. Stacy kicked one in the chops, which sent the animal away yelping.

"Don't!" rebuked Hippy, not taking his eyes from the Indians.

"He tried to take a chunk out of my leg. I guess I will kick him if I want to."

Whatever reply Lieutenant Wingate was about to make was checked by a shrill cry in Sioux uttered by a squaw. This, it appeared, was the signal for a renewal of the attack. The victim had now gotten to her feet and was trying to steal away when a blow from the fist of a buck sent

her reeling. Shouts, yells, shrill cries and explosive utterances were heard on all sides. It was more than Lieutenant Wingate could endure.

"You stop that!" he roared, the hot blood rushing to his face.

The group fell back as Hippy charged in among them, thrusting braves and squaws out of his way. He did not stop to consider that he was doing an imprudent thing — a perilous thing for himself and his companion. Reaching the center of the angry group, Hippy seized the dazed squaw and fairly carried her beyond the warring circle of braves, squaws, dogs and children.

The squaw staggered away, soon caught her balance, then ran with all speed for the protection of the brush, a volley of stones following, amid the jeers, hoots and yells of the villagers.

Now that their victim had succeeded in escaping, the Indians turned their attention to Hippy, chattered menacingly for a few seconds, then, with one accord, moved threateningly towards the Overland Rider.

Hippy, who had laid down his rifle, began slowly backing towards it. At this juncture Stacy gave a shrill whistle through his teeth, and as the Indians glanced in his direction he significantly tapped the rifle on which he was leaning.

"Don't forget that I've got a gun, you savages!" warned the boy.

CHAPTER V

MISSING IN THE HILLS

“**Y**OU buck over there with the club!” warned the fat boy, again tapping his rifle significantly. “Shinny on your own side.”

“Don’t you bother that woman again, either,” added Hippy, picking up his rifle. “Remember, if you do you will hear from the Indian Agent.”

No reply was made to either remark, but the black looks of the braves and squaws made up for their lack of speech.

“Come along, Chunky, you did finely. We are about as popular ’round here as a couple of snakes at a lawn party.”

Without deigning another look at the roaming band of Sioux both Overland men turned their backs on them and strode from the camp, and as the Overlanders disappeared in the shrubbery a medley of screeches from the squaws and yelps from the braves sped them on their way.

“I reckon the ladies back there have found their tongues,” chuckled Lieutenant Wingate. “Do

you know, Chunky, I have a feeling on the inside of me that I have put my foot in it? ”

“ Do you know, Uncle Hip, I’ve got a feeling all over the outside of me that somehow you have put both feet in it? Do you know some more — the squaw that was being walloped didn’t look to me like a squaw at all.”

“ It was a squaw. No doubt as to that,” differed Hippy. “ And, had we not chanced to come along when we did, they undoubtedly would have killed the poor thing. I don’t yet know what it was all about. Do you? ”

“ Nobody knows why a redskin does things. I wish San Antonio had been with us. I’ll bet he would have made sieves of some of those bucks. What now? ”

“ Home, before the Indians change their minds and get after us. Besides, it is getting late and we shall have to hustle or we won’t get in until after dark. I hate to go back without getting a shot at a single thing, but it can’t be helped.”

Stacy said they had been fighting bigger game than deer, and that that was more than the other two hunters would have to boast about.

The Overland men were now heading for home at a swinging pace, Hippy now and then casting a look back over his shoulder to see if they were being followed. He did not know what the Indians might do after they had had time to

think over the interference of the two strangers. Dusk already was at hand when they reached the point at which they had parted from Grace and Elfreda.

"Wal?" drawled a familiar voice. "What luck?"

"Hulloa, San Antonio, Texas!" greeted Stacy. "We met a whole flock of bucks, but didn't shoot any of them."

"Why not?"

"Because they were Indian bucks. Ha, ha!" laughed Chunky.

"Where are the young women?" demanded San Antone abruptly, seeming to realize for the first time that they were not with Stacy and Hippy.

Lieutenant Wingate explained that the girls had gone away by themselves, but that they probably had returned to camp long before then. He then related the story of their meeting with the roving band of Sioux and their defense of the unfortunate squaw.

"You-all don't mean to say thet you did thet?" demanded San Antone in amazement.

"Yes. Why not? They were abusing her shamefully."

"Lieutenant, you-all air shore in fer trouble now. Thet 'squaw' probably wan't no squaw at all — she probably was a 'squaw-buck'?"

“What did I tell you?” nodded Stacy. “What is a ‘squaw-buck’?”

“A real he-buck in disgrace, a feller thet had showed a yellow streak in some test or other an’ has been made to wear squaw clothes an’ do squaws’ work an’ get kicked an’ punched fer his pains. They call thet breed ‘squaws’ or ‘squaw-bucks.’ If this is thet, then, Lieutenant, you-all hev insulted them redskins an’ they won’t never fergit it. They’ll take it out of you-all the first chance thet they get.”

“That doesn’t frighten me any, San Antone,” answered Hippy.

“Another thing. When you-all find a village off in the Hills like thet you may be shore thet the redskins air nursin’ a grouch, an’ thet they’re tryin’ to get away from the eyes of the Indian Agent so they can cut up devilment. So long as they keep out of mischief he don’t bother ‘em. Somethin’ shore is brewin’ in these heah Hills, I reckon.”

“What eventually happens to the ‘squaw’?” questioned Hippy as they walked along with the guide to his pony, on which he had packed a fine young deer. “How long does he have to be a ‘squaw’?”

“Thet depends. He must take all the insults an’ not kick. If he is yellow an’ goes to the Indian Agent an’ asks fer protection he’ll be dis-

graced ever after an' mebbby lose his life as a result. If, howso, he perform some deed thet, in the eyes of the Council, wipes out his yellow streak, then the critter goes back as a buck among bucks."

Hippy cast a sidelong glance at Chunky and grinned.

"Boy, I reckon we stirred up more than we thought," he said.

"I reckon," nodded the fat boy.

They looked over the deer on San Antone's pony with rather envious eyes, and, for the sake of their own reputations as hunters, sincerely hoped that Grace and Elfreda had had no better luck than they.

"Say, Lieutenant!" exclaimed the guide after they had started for camp. "Thet black feller was 'round the diggin's again to-day."

"The Man in Black?" questioned Stacy, instantly interested.

"Yes. Miss Dean seen him peckin' 'way at a rock. Funny thing. He got out of sight so quick thet Miss Dean didn't see him go. An', do you-all know, I couldn't find his trail. I reckon I'll throw a gun on him one of these days an' see if he is real," threatened the guide.

"I reckon you will do nothing of the sort," retorted Hippy.

They reached the camp in the early evening, in

fact, the campfire lighted them in on the last stage of their hike. The Overlanders heard them approaching, and Tom Gray was on the lookout to see who was coming.

"Did you get any game?" he called.

"Yes. We and San Antonio, Texas, got a fine young buck," called back Stacy as they were entering the camp.

"Are the girls coming along?" questioned Tom, passing a hand over the deer and complimenting the hunters on their luck.

"The girls!" exclaimed Lieutenant Wingate. "Are — aren't they here?"

"No. They are with you. Don't give me heart disease by telling me they are not," laughed Tom, believing that Hippy was seeking to stir him up.

"What's thet?" drawled San Antone.

"To — om, you surely don't mean to say that Grace and Elfreda have not returned?" exclaimed Hippy.

"We haven't seen them since they went out with you and Stacy this forenoon. Where did you last see them?" Tom's voice was steady but tense.

"About three miles from here. They decided that they didn't care to go on with us, so we went on, and —"

"They're lost!" cried Nora Wingate.

"No. Trust Grace for finding her way back to

camp every time. Something has happened to them," groaned Tom Gray.

"Tony!" It was Emma Dean's voice, and the note in it thrilled and stirred San Antone as he never had been stirred before.

The guide fairly tore the buck from his saddle. Hippy and Tom, with one accord, ran for their ponies.

"Tom, you stay here!" urged Hippy. "It is necessary that I go to show San Antone where the girls left us. Someone must stay to protect the camp."

"I'm going," was Tom's brief answer. "Stacy, you stay here and look after Nora and Emma."

By the time the two men had led their ponies into the camp, San Antone was flinging himself into his saddle, and a few seconds later the guide was galloping away, setting a pace so reckless that the two Overland Riders momentarily expected to come to grief.

Nora stood wringing her hands and weeping, following the departure. Stacy's eyes were big and solemn, but Emma was the most self-possessed of all.

"Stacy, don't look at me like that. Be a man and tell me where and how you left Grace and Elfreda. Where was it?" she demanded.

The Overland boy told her all that he knew about that phase of the mystery. Following this,

Emma led him on to speak of the experiences of himself and Lieutenant Wingate with the roving band of Sioux, from which the little Overland girl shrewdly drew her own conclusions.

All unknown to the three Overlanders there was another interested listener to Stacy Brown's story, an eager listener who lay secreted in the bushes but a few yards from Chunky and Emma. Not a word of the conversation was lost to his alert ears, but he made no move until some time after Stacy had finished and Emma had suggested that they let the fire die down and sit in the shadows with their rifles ready in case the camp was disturbed.

The eavesdropper then crawled off for a little distance, got up and started walking away, but he did not go far. Apparently changing his mind he sat down where, though well screened from sight, an excellent view of the entire camp was afforded.

The hours dragged on wearily for those waiting in camp, eagerly listening for the sound of the returning horsemen. The three ate their supper without much relish, certainly with no enjoyment. Nine o'clock came and the fire was nearly burned out, when Stacy announced that he was not going to sit in the dark, and promptly threw fresh fuel on the coals. A blaze leaped up and soon the camp was brightly lighted.

"You shouldn't have done that," rebuked Emma. "Now we must get farther back in the shadows. Oh!"

A revolver shot crashed out in the still air with a report that brought the Overlanders to their feet. A yell, a floundering in the bushes, was instantly followed by a scream from Nora Wingate.

Stacy Brown started on a run for his tent, then, shamed by Emma, he halted with rifle at ready.

"Keep steady and keep quiet!" directed Emma with a calmness that she did not feel. "Don't shoot unless you are certain what you are shooting at," she added, making ready her own rifle for instant action.

CHAPTER VI

“ I’M GOIN’ TO KILL A MAN ”

NOT a sound followed the shooting, except as Nora Wingate, who sat huddled under a bush, uttered an occasional moan. Emma and Stacy pluckily held their positions almost without a movement for a full hour, and the mysterious eavesdropper also held his position a few yards beyond the camp.

In the meantime San Antone, with Tom Gray and Hippy Wingate, had pulled up at the point where Grace and Elfreda had last been seen.

“ They went off to the right from here,” announced Hippy.

The guide flung himself from his pony without a word. The Texan’s long training on the ranges and in the Hills stood him in good stead. Without loss of time he gathered wood for torches and lighted them, handing one to Hippy.

“ Cap’n Gray, you lead the ponies while the lieutenant an’ I look around heah a bit,” he directed.

“ I think I have their trail,” announced Hippy,

bending over to peer at the ground. San Antone was at his side in an instant, and there in the soft earth he saw the footprints of two small boots.

"This is them," agreed the guide. "You follow them and I'll look along the sides of the trail to see if anybody else was watchin' the women."

"You — you don't think —" began Tom in alarm.

"Don't think nothin'. Jest lookin'," replied the guide tersely.

Hippy found little difficulty in keeping the trail of the two girls. Now and then a stretch of rock caused him to lose it, but he soon picked up the trail farther on.

San Antone was trotting along some little distance from Hippy, first on one side of the trail, then on the other, Tom following with the horses and noting the surroundings with the eyes of a man trained to finding his way about; for Tom was a forester by profession, and thoroughly at home in the open.

"Hark! I thought I heard a shot. It sounded a long way off. Do you think it is the girls signaling to us?" Tom questioned sharply.

"I heard it," drawled San Antone. "It wan't them. Thet was a revolver, an' I reckon it was somewhere near our camp."

They stood still, listening for a few moments, but there was no repetition of the shot. What they had faintly heard was the shot fired just outside of the Overland camp, and the last echo of it in the Hills had barely reached them.

"Cap'n Gray, I reckon somethin' is goin' on over by the camp, an' thet you'd better go back an' look into it. What do you-all reckon?"

"Yes. We shall feel easier if you do, Tom. Of course, if you wish, I will go back," volunteered Hippy.

"I'll go," answered Tom after slight hesitancy. "You will let me know as soon as you find them, won't you?"

"We will give you gun-signals," answered Lieutenant Wingate. "Keep your ears open."

"Mebby we won't get back till mornin', so don't worry 'bout us," urged the guide.

Without another word Tom turned over the two ponies to San Antone who staked them down, after which Captain Gray rode away at a fast jog.

"I reckon thet shot didn't 'mount to much, but I didn't want him 'long 'cause I reckon we're goin' to find somethin' round heah that would make the cap'n red-headed," observed the guide.

"San Antone, what do you mean?" demanded Hippy.

"Wal, mebbly I don't mean nothin' at all, but

I shore do reckon thet we shall find somethin' in thet gulch jest ahaid of us. Heah is a fresh torch. Now watch out an' keep you-all's gun whar you can reach it in a hurry."

Lieutenant Wingate did not catch the full significance of the guide's words, but he did know that San Antone was disturbed and that he feared some peril had overtaken the girls. Both men now settled down in earnest to follow the trail, which led them towards the gulch that the guide had just mentioned.

Entering the gloomy gulch, they had proceeded some distance when Hippy uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Come here!" he cried. "What is this?"

San Antone was trotting along some little dising at a soiled sheet of paper that Hippy held towards him. The guide took one glance at it, then directed his attention to the rock from which Lieutenant Wingate had picked up the paper.

"Don't you-all know 'bout this heah? This is whar the girls set down to eat their lunch. Nothin' heah to hold us up, so we'll be hittin' the trail again."

The ground being rocky made their work less certain here, but San Antone said that a short distance ahead the gulch widened and the ground being softer there, trailing would be easier. At the point where they then were, the two girls

could have gone only one of two ways, ahead, or turned back towards home. The searchers knew that they had not turned back, therefore they continued on rather more rapidly than before.

As San Antone had said would be the case, a quarter of a mile farther on the gulch widened into a narrow valley covered with a thick growth of bushes and spindling trees. There the guide took the lead, directing his companion to fall behind, help light the way, and take care of their mounts. San Antone worked rapidly but painstakingly. The trail now was so plain that a novice could have followed it, for bushes were broken over and footprints were easily discernible, and the guide hurried on filled with eagerness.

"Heah it is!" he announced, halting abruptly, swinging his torch slowly back and forth as he keenly surveyed the surroundings.

"A spring?" questioned Hippy.

"Yes. An' thet's what I reckoned on findin'. But thet ain't all. The women stopped heah fer a drink of water, an' I reckon we'll find thet thet's 'bout all they did do. Stay whar you be till I look 'round a little."

Bent well forward, torch thrust ahead of him, San Antone ran about in a manner that reminded Lieutenant Wingate of a rabbit dog following a crooked scent. Hippy observed, too, that the bushes about the spring had been freshly trampled

down and that they looked as if the trampling had been done by several persons.

Returning to the spring, San Antone examined the ground about it with critical eyes, then trotted on ahead again, his torch bobbing up and down like a light buoy on troubled shoal waters.

Hippy left the ponies for a few moments during the absence of the guide, and made an examination of the ground in the immediate vicinity of the spring to satisfy his own curiosity. That examination caused him to utter an exclamation. Instead of two pairs of footprints there were many, nor were these prints all made by the narrow boots of the two Overland girls.

Startling as the discovery was, Hippy Wingate did not yet realize the full meaning of it. He called to San Antone to know what it all meant, but the guide did not answer.

Upon the Texan's return, Hippy was awed as, in the light of the torch held aloft by San Antone, he saw the expression on the guide's face.

"What is it?" begged Hippy.

"Lieutenant, I'm goin' to kill a man," drawled the guide, and in his slow, easy speech there was a note deadly and terrible.

"You think —"

"I know! Indians! The Indians got 'em — took 'em over thar whar their ponies war tethered, and carried 'em away!"

“God help them!” groaned Lieutenant Wingate. “What can we do?”

“Do! Ride — ride! Ride like all possessed, an’ when we find ’em —” The guide hitched his revolver belt, and fairly flung himself into his saddle. Hippy, following his example, was soon tearing along, in the light shed by San Antone’s streaming torch.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT OF THRILLS

“LOYALHEART, it is getting late,” reminded Elfreda Briggs, as they strolled out into the valley where later the guide and Hippy found their tracks. “We have done much talking, but little hunting.”

“What does it matter? We have had a happy day,” answered Grace laughingly. “Here is a spring. Let us get a drink, sit down and rest for a few moments, then start campward.”

“Don’t you think we had best start at once? It will be dark when we reach camp,” urged Miss Briggs.

“I think not. I at least am going to have some of this wonderful water. There are no germs in mountain water, J. Elfreda.”

The girls drank their fill and sat chatting for a few moments, their rifles beside them ready for use in case game should be sighted. Finally Grace said they must be going, then all at once she whirled, and found herself gazing into the faces of two Indian squaws. They were sullen faces,

and the eyes of the squaws held a menace that was not to be mistaken.

"How!" greeted Grace with an assurance that she was far from feeling. Elfreda was speechless with amazement.

As she spoke, the girls started to rise, but at that instant both squaws snatched off their brightly colored blankets and leaping on the two girls, they cast the blankets over the Overlanders' heads.

Now thoroughly aroused Grace and Elfreda fought with all their strength. With the arms of a squaw about her, each girl rolled and struggled, both squaws uttering shrill cries that brought several Indian bucks to the scene. Firm hands were now laid on the Overland girls and their arms were pinioned to their sides.

Grace and Elfreda were helpless. Struggling would now avail them nothing, so both saved their strength and awaited the further actions of their captors. The girls were soon picked up bodily and carried some distance, when both Grace and Elfreda were lifted to the back of an Indian pony.

"You try get away, me kill!" shouted a squaw's voice close to Miss Briggs' ear.

"Thank heaven we are allowed to ride together and alone," muttered Grace, already beginning to plan for escape at the first opportunity.

The pony soon was jogging along at a rapid pace. Elfreda, who was sitting in front, with Grace just behind her, clung to the girth of the saddleless pony with the tips of her fingers, but Grace, having no such support, slipped and slid from side to side in imminent peril of falling off with every jolt of the horse.

The journey seemed unending. Night came on, but still the Indians and their captives jogged on, traveling for a long distance in the bed of a stream. The girls knew this because of the water splashed over their feet by their mount.

Late in the night the party halted and a conference was held by their captors with another party of Indians; then the journey was resumed, but the rest of that grilling ride, while brief, was one that neither Overland girl ever forgot. The final halt was made sometime in the early hours of the morning, whereupon there followed another pow-wow in which they heard a voice that seemed to belong to a white man.

Elfreda uttered a sudden cry for help. An instant later both girls were jerked from their mount by a group of chattering squaws and pushed stumbling and protesting into a building that, later, proved to be an old deserted smelter in a once prosperous mining district of the Black Hills. They were thrust into a room and the door slammed behind them.

Worn out in mind and body the Overland girls sank down moaning, but soon, in sudden realization that they were alone, they began struggling to free themselves. Miss Briggs succeeded in doing so first, then toppled over in utter exhaustion. She was up in a moment and tugging at Grace's bonds.

"Grace!" she cried, as she succeeded in stripping the blanket from her companion. "Are you all right?"

"No, but I think I am still alive," gasped Grace. "Wait! Let me rest," she begged, stretching out on her back on the floor, where she lay for a few moments and then rose unsteadily to her feet.

Elfreda was already up.

"Did they take your revolver, Loyalheart?" she questioned.

"Yes. And yours?"

"My holster is empty, but I am not wholly defenseless," replied Miss Briggs with a confident note in her voice that led Grace to wonder what she meant. After fumbling in search of her match box, Elfreda finally found it and struck a light. By its flickering light they saw that they were in a big room, blackened rafters showing faintly in the shadows high over their heads. The windows were heavily boarded and a stout wooden door, that, after a cautious attempt to open, Elfreda

found was secured on the outside. Two broken wooden chairs and a pine table were the only pieces of furniture in the room.

"Grace, what do you think this means?" wondered Miss Briggs.

"I don't know, and I am too worn out to think. The one big problem before us now is, how are we to get away, for get away we must. I wish we had our weapons."

"We have. Grace, I have a confession to make. I have a good trusty automatic revolver in a holster attached to my money belt under my clothes. My experience with the Overlanders has taught Elfreda Briggs to go prepared for all eventualities."

"Good! That puts new life into me, Elfreda. Don't use it unless our lives depend upon it, then shoot straight. I think — Merciful Heaven! What is that?"

A scream, the wildest, weirdest, most thrilling that they had ever heard, echoed through the old building. The screams continued, now sounding close at hand.

"A woman!" cried Grace.

"They are coming nearer," whispered Elfreda. "She is at the door!"

The screams were now more thrilling, and then began a tremendous pounding on the heavy door. Each stroke of some heavy object was accompanied by another of those soul-chilling screams.

“Go away or I’ll shoot!” threatened Elfreda in a voice pitched high with excitement.

“No, no!” protested Grace Harlowe. “Don’t lose yourself. Keep your head, Elfreda, and help me to keep mine or I surely shall go to pieces. Indians are preferable to this.”

“She is going away! Thank Heaven!” moaned Elfreda, a few moments later.

“And going fast,” muttered Grace, as the screams sounded farther and farther away.

Then a new sound at the door put both girls instantly on the alert. A key rattled in the lock and a bar was removed from the outside of the door, then the door opened ever so little and a lantern was thrust in. The Overland girls drew back into the deeper shadows and waited breathlessly, waited until a man stepped in and raised the lantern above his head to keep the light out of his own eyes and give him a better view of the room.

It was far from being a prepossessing face that the girls momentarily saw, and there was something familiar about it to both, but the memory it revived was gone almost as quickly as it came.

“What do you want?” demanded Grace much more bravely than she felt.

“Ah reckon Ah wants some information. If you-all give it to me straight Ah’ll see that you git out.”

"Stand where you are!" commanded Miss Briggs sternly. "What do you wish to know?"

"Ah reckons you-all ain't here fer no good a-tall. Who be ye an' what be ye doin' in these Hills?"

"We are members of the Overland Riders, traveling through the Hills for pleasure," answered Grace.

"Ah! So? Ah reckoned that war it. That's one thing that Ah wanted to know. Helpin' the revenue officers to meddle with other folks' business, be ye?"

Elfreda said they knew no revenue officers, had no connection with them, and wished only to be let alone and permitted to follow their own trail without interference.

"If that is all you wish to know," she added, "I would suggest that you go away, leaving the door open so that we may go. I warn you that any further interference with us will result in serious difficulties for you and the Indians who are serving you so well. The Indian Agent shall be informed of what they did last night. That means that you will come in for some of the punishment meted out to them."

"Don't!" whispered Grace.

"Permit us to go and we will promise to say nothing about your part in this present affair," then announced Miss Briggs.



"I Have Warned You!"

“Not yit. Ah reckon you-all air goin’ to stay heah till we find out ’bout the rest of the gang that’s with ye. Ah’ll git a better look at ye now, so’s Ah’ll know ye when Ah sees ye again,” added the man, taking a step forward and holding the lantern higher.

“Stop! Don’t you dare come another inch farther,” warned Elfreda Briggs in a shrill voice.

The man gave no heed to the warning, but moved cautiously forward, peering, seeking for a look at the faces of the girls so that he might not forget them, or for recognition of someone that he had seen before.

“I have warned you!” reminded Elfreda in a steadier tone.

Her warning was unheeded.

A flash and a sharp report followed almost instantly. The lantern in the hand of the man suddenly went out accompanied by the sound of breaking glass. Elfreda Briggs had fired point-blank at him, but her shot had gone high and shattered the lantern.

“I’ll kill you-all fer that!” yelled the fellow, starting for Miss Briggs.

Elfreda fired again, but the shot went wild.

Grace, at this juncture, snatched up one of the chairs and hurled it at the man. It crashed at his feet, and the fellow, tripping on it, measured his length on the floor.

“Run!” cried Grace in a shrill voice. “Don’t shoot again!”

The Overland girls dashed out through the open door, followed by the angry shouts of their victim and thrilling screams in a woman’s voice, the same soul-stirring screams that they had heard before.

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE THE TRAIL LED

FOR some distance San Antone and Lieutenant Wingate found little difficulty in following the trail left by the Indian ponies, but when finally they came to a water-course it became more difficult. This difficulty lessened somewhat when once more the mountains closed in on them and they again found themselves in a deep canyon.

"They can go only one way now," observed Hippy encouragingly.

"Two miles further on the canyon splits into three. That means more trouble for us," answered the guide.

They soon reached the dividing point where they dismounted, the guide making a thorough examination of the little mountain streams that flowed through the three gorges and finally returning to his companion.

"The critters split up heah," he announced.

"What do you mean, Tony?"

"Went three ways," answered the guide. "I

reckons, though, thet the ones we air lookin' fer took the left-hand canyon. One pony thet went thet way sunk its feet deeper into the ground than any of the others. Thet means thet he carried a heavier load. It's my opinion thet both girls was put on one pony an' thet the pony went the way I said. We'll go thet way."

"Tony!" cried Hippy, laboring under considerable excitement. "Which way from here is the camp of those Indians that Stacy and I came upon to-day?"

"The way we are goin'," drawled the guide.

"That is where they are. Don't you see, Tony? The Sioux, enraged at our interference with their sport when we defended the 'squaw,' have taken revenge by abducting Miss Briggs and Mrs. Gray. You are going to that Indian camp, aren't you?"

"We air goin' to follow the trail as long as we can see it, I reckon," replied San Antone, and turned his pony into the left-hand gulch, through which the riders rode splashing until they were soon soaked to the skin.

It was at dawn on the following morning when they emerged from the canyon into the open country, and it was less than twenty minutes after that that they lost the trail they had been following. Nor was San Antone, with all his skill, able to find it again.

"What now?" demanded Lieutenant Wingate.

The guide pondered, ill at ease, for a moment.

"We'll look in on thet camp. Thet's the outfit thet did the dirty trick, I reckon."

At sunrise they rode up to the scene of Hippy's exploit with the "squaw," but there were no Indians there. They had abandoned their camp and sought other hunting grounds.

San Antone said that he had looked for that very thing.

"We'll find the critters," he drawled. "Bein' so many of 'em, they can't hide their trail."

The trail was, as he had indicated, an easy one to follow, and they came in sight of the smoke of campfires about noon that day, and soon the faint odor of the smoke of their cook fires was in the nostrils of the weary riders.

"Gracious! That surely makes me hungry," groaned Hippy. "Do you suppose they are serving up any hot dogs to-day, Tony?"

The guide made no reply. His face was set, and Lieutenant Wingate thought he knew what was passing through the mind of San Antone.

The two white men burst into the camp of the wandering Sioux at a gallop and brought their ponies down sliding. Without an instant's hesitation, San Antone flung himself from his saddle and strode in among the braves and the squaws who were eating their meal from black kettles.

Hippy Wingate was recognized instantly, but

only a few of the braves got up. The rest sat on their haunches, stolidly chewing on large hunks of boiled meat.

"What you want?" demanded a brave.

"Who is your chief?" demanded San Antone.

"Chief Wild Tree. Him in tepee," said the Indian to whom the question had been addressed.

The guide needed no direction to the chief's tepee, for a feather crowning its peak indicated that it was the abode of the chief of these wanderers of the Hills.

San Antone strode to the tepee and flung back the flap.

"Come out of that, ye houn'!" he commanded.

Chief Wild Tree, tall, straight, rose to his full height and advanced, making the sign of peace, which San Antone ignored.

"Whar did you-all leave them girls you stole last night?" The question, suddenly put, was couched in the lazy tone that San Antone knew so well how to assume.

"Not know what you mean," answered the chief.

"Mebby this will wake you-all up!" The guide thrust the muzzle of his revolver against the chief's stomach. "You tell me what you know or you air a dead Indian. Where be they?"

"Not know," persisted the chief stubbornly.
"All good Indians!"

"You will be a good Indian soon if you don't talk straight. Good Indians air dead Indians. Who carried off those girls? You scoundrel, I'll give you-all one minute to tell the truth."

"Not know. You look, see! "

"I will, then I'll settle with you." San Antone strode to the nearest tepee, pulled aside the flap and looked in. He went on to others, here and there entering to look at some object that attracted his attention.

Murmurs of resentment began to be heard, to all of which the guide gave no heed, but Hippy felt concerned. He drew his rifle from its holster and sat waiting.

"Hold your tongues!" he roared, whereupon the mutterings died away.

San Antone, after looking into all the tepees, strode over to the Indian ponies and looked them over keenly. When he started towards Chief Wild Tree, the guide's face was flaming.

"Steady!" warned Hippy as San Antone passed him. It is doubtful, however, if the guide heard the sound of his companion's voice.

"Them hosses hev been in the water — four of 'em hev been rode hard. Their laigs an' sides is covered with spatterin's from a muddy arroyo. What do you-all 'low fer thet?" demanded the guide, his eyes blazing with blue lightning.

"Three white men git um last night. Pay

Chief Wild Tree. See! ” The chief exhibited a ten-dollar bill. “ Come back near sun-up.”

“ Who were they? ”

“ Not know um.”

“ You-all let strange white men take your ponies? No. Thet ain’t the Indian way of doin’. It wan’t white men thet rode them ponies, it war Indians, an’ when I find out who them critters war, somebody’s goin’ to die. If I find you’ve been lyin’ to me, I’ll come back an’ kill you. I ought to do it now, but instead I’m goin’ to give you a wallop — put a bump on you-all’s haid. If yer tellin’ the truth, you-all will go to the Indian Agent at Pine Ridge an’ complain ’bout me fer attackin’ ye. If you don’t complain to the Agency I’ll know you’re the liar thet I reckons ye be, an’ I’ll come back and kill ye till yer daid! ”

San Antone like a flash brought the butt of his revolver down on the Indian’s head with a resounding whack that was heard all over the camp.

Chief Wild Tree crumpled down in a heap and toppled over on his side. The guide turned a contorted face to the camp where mutterings were growing into a menacing growl.

“ Does any of ye cayuses reckon ye wants to git the other end of this heah gun? ” he drawled, gently swaying the muzzle from side to side, its movements encompassing the entire camp. “ If ye don’t, shet up! ”

San Antone lounged over to his pony, mounted with a bound, whirled the animal about and sat glaring at the band of Sioux, challenging them with his eyes, hoping deep down in his heart that someone would take up his defi.

"Pigs!" he drawled in a tone of disgust, and putting spurs to his mount dashed away, followed in a hurry by Lieutenant Wingate.

"You started something this time!" shouted Hippy as he pulled up alongside his companion. "Where now?"

"Back to the camp. Mebby the girls air thar by this time. If they ain't I'm goin' to take two fresh ponies an' ride fer the Agency to git somethin' else started."

"Do you think that old Wild Tree had anything to do with the stealing of the girls, Tony?"

"If I knew it I'd a-killed him. I'll do it yit if he did. Thar's one thing sartin. Them ponies hev been on jest the kind of a ride I said. There's another thing sartin. If he don't ride hot foot to the Indian Agent at Pine Ridge, he's in this thing. Leastwise, he knows somethin' 'bout it, and thar's goin' to be music in these parts right smart after I git back from the Ridge," finished the guide, urging his weary mount on to greater speed.

It was well past the middle of the afternoon when the guide and Lieutenant Wingate rode into

the Overland camp, their ponies reeking with sweat, the men themselves dusty and saddle-weary.

"Oh, Tony!" cried Emma, running to San Antone, as he sagged wearily from his saddle to the ground. "Don't — don't tell me that you did not find them!"

"We found whar they'd been and we discovered what took 'em away," answered San Antone, his face brightening as he gazed down into the pleading eyes of Emma Dean.

Tom Gray already had led Hippy off to one side where he was listening anxiously to the story of the search as related by Hippy.

"I'm worried so that I've lost my appetite, Tom," groaned Hippy.

"So am I in a way, but I know that those girls are all right, Hippy," declared Tom with a ring of confidence in his tone. "I know Grace and I know Elfreda, and I know that those two can get out of trouble almost as readily as they can get into it." Tom smiled faintly. "What is San Antone proposing to do now?"

"He is going to the Agency at Pine Ridge to start an inquiry from there."

"I hope he hasn't shot anyone in his excitement over this affair."

"Not yet, but he walloped Chief Wild Tree, and threatens to go back and shoot him up later on."

Emma was telling San Antone of their own experiences when she, Nora and Stacy were in the camp alone the previous night, of the shot that had been fired, the yell and the floundering, and that Tom that very morning had found blood out where the disturbance occurred.

San Antone pondered over this information, then brightened.

"Miss Dean, I reckon you-all got a good friend 'round heah somewhar," he drawled.

"Two good friends, Tony. One is here now," answered Emma. "You will find Grace and Elfreda, won't you?"

"I'll nevah stop until I do, Miss Dean," replied San Antone. "I say, Lieutenant, you-all bettah keep an eye out fer the feller thet's been imperillin' the lives of this heah outfit by shooting so promiscuous-like 'round this camp. Miss Dean, if you-all will fix me up some grub, I reckon I'll be on my way."

Nora hurriedly made coffee while the guide was saddling two fresh ponies, one to be ridden, the other led. Emma began to fry bacon, but San Antone would not wait for it. Instead, he gulped down two cups of coffee and filled his kit with biscuit and tinned beef, then, mounting, rode away. Hippy and Tom were disappointed that the guide did not wish them to accompany him, but San Antone said he had his reasons for this.

"He is himself a savage," declared Tom.

"Savage he may be, but that fellow is a man, Tom Gray," defended Emma Dean.

"I agree with you," added Hippy, nodding his approval of the sentiment.

"He is too sudden, that fellow is," declared Stacy, who up to this moment had listened wide-eyed to the discussion that had been going on. "I am glad, though, that he hit that Indian chief a good wallop. I had been thinking of going back there and doing the same thing myself," added the fat boy boastfully.

There was nothing more that the Overlanders could do for the missing ones so far as present conditions indicated, so they began their preparations for dinner, to which they sat down in thoughtful silence.

In the meantime Grace Harlowe and Elfreda Briggs were far off in the Hills, weary, hungry, and at times discouraged.

As they fled from the old smelter they had no idea where they were going. Their one thought was to get away from there, but ere they could do so bullets began to whistle about them, bullets fired from the revolver of the fellow who had sought to get information from them.

The girls ducked low and changed their course and were soon out of immediate peril.

"We shall be tracked!" gasped Grace. "We must try to cover our tracks. Look for a water-course. Never mind which way we go."

They found no water-course, but fortunately soon gained rocky footing and thence proceeded with great care, trying to break down no bushes nor to leave a footprint in soft ground that was occasionally encountered.

"Loyalheart! How long do you think we shall be able to keep this up?" complained Miss Briggs.

"Until we get to camp," answered Grace resolutely.

"But to-morrow those terrible people will find us. They have ponies and can easily overtake us once they find our trail."

"We will hide for the greater part of the day and get our bearings for the night's journey. I am inclined to believe that we are traveling in the general direction of our camp right now."

They continued on, now traveling less rapidly, laying their course by the stars so far as they were able to do so, getting many falls, experiencing frights when some small animal suddenly leaped across the way ahead of them. The night was chill, but they did not feel it, for their bodies were glowing from the strenuous exercise.

Finally Elfreda fell into a stream of icy mountain water, and uttered a little shriek. Grace,

hearing the splash, ran to the assistance of her companion.

"Oh, this is frightful," groaned Elfreda.

"Cheer up!" encouraged Grace, laughing in spite of herself. "Water is what we have been looking for."

"Yes, but not to fall into," grumbled Miss Briggs.

"We are going to walk in this stream as long as possible, so make up your mind to get wetter," answered Grace. "First, I want a drink."

"Not for me. I swallowed too much water when I fell into the creek," declared Elfreda.

A few moments later they were splashing cautiously down the stream, unable to move rapidly for fear of stepping into a deep hole or slipping on a moss-covered stone. In this way they progressed until day began to dawn. As soon as they discovered this they halted for consultation, and finally decided to climb the side of the canyon through which they had been traveling, and spend the day on the higher ground. This promised to give them a better view of the surrounding country, and enable them to watch for the pursuit that they fully expected.

They gained the top of the mountain just as the sun was rising.

"Look!" cried Grace. "Isn't that the Crazy Jane peak that the guide pointed out to us?"

"It does look like it," agreed Elfreda. "Grace! I wonder — I wonder if it was the living Crazy Jane that we heard uttering those awful shrieks last night."

"It may have been. Let's not talk about it. It gives me the shivers. I propose that we now have breakfast, and then lie down for a rest."

"Breakfast!" exclaimed J. Elfreda. "Be good enough not to tantalize me. I have an appetite such as Stacy Brown never dreamed of."

"Just imagine that you have had a nice breakfast of eggs on toast and a cup of delicious coffee, and then lie down and you will sleep like a child after it has swallowed a bottle of sterilized milk."

"Don't!" begged Miss Briggs.

"Let me compliment you, too, on the wonderful way you helped us to get away, and for your remarkable marksmanship as exhibited last night. Tell me, J. Elfreda, did you really shoot at the lantern?" teased Grace.

"No. I tried to hit the man in the leg," confessed Elfreda. "Instead I hit the lantern as he held it above his head."

"You surely can qualify as a sharpshooter," chuckled Grace. "Lie down and rest now. I think I shall take forty winks myself."

The "forty winks" stretched out until late in the afternoon, when Grace suddenly sat up, a startled look in her eyes, then called to her com-

panion. Elfreda aroused herself with an effort, and sank back wearily.

"Loyalheart! I fear I am all in," she groaned.

"Nonsense! Let us now plan for the rest of our journey. I believe we shall be wise to head for the 'Crazy Jane' peak along towards night, and keep going until we reach familiar ground. We can, I think, by moving cautiously, follow this ridge for the present, but we must keep out of sight as much as possible."

Elfreda agreed wearily.

"I must have water. My throat is parched," she said.

After a search and failure to find a spring, the girls started on. An hour later they found water trickling from a crevice in the rocks, and threw themselves down and drank freely. It refreshed them very much and gave them new courage to press on. As they slowly progressed, the ridge on which they were traveling took a gradual dip towards the valley beyond, the valley that Grace believed would lead them to a trail for the camp.

As night approached they increased their pace and by dusk were well down in the valley.

"I smell smoke!" cried Elfreda, shortly after they had gained the lower lands. A long inhalation told Grace that her companion was right.

"Let us find it," urged Miss Briggs. "I must have food."

"We can at least have a look. Should the fire belong to Indians, we simply dare not take the chance of letting them see us," reminded Grace.

The girls pressed on rapidly now, not in the general direction that they thought their camp lay, but following the smoke scent, which was not difficult, for a gentle breeze was blowing it directly towards them. In half an hour after the first indication of human habitation they heard dogs barking and the distant sound of voices.

From then on they proceeded with greater caution, continuing on until the campfires of an Indian village were revealed to them.

"Elfreda, it won't do. I don't dare go on," whispered Grace. "Come! Let us get away from here as quickly as possible. I—"

A sudden scream from Elfreda checked the words on the other girl's lips, as a heavy hand was laid on Miss Briggs' shoulder.

Grace whirled and her heart sank when she found herself facing two Indians, one of whom held Elfreda in a firm grip.

"We no hurt. You come see chief," commanded the second Indian.

"Let go of me!" cried Elfreda excitedly, struggling to free herself.

"You come, let go," answered Miss Briggs' captor.

There was no other course to follow, so the

Overland girls walked on ahead of the bucks who undoubtedly had been posted as sentinels just outside the camp.

Such a chatter as went up from the squaws when the girls were led into the light of the village fires they had never before heard. Not only this, but black eyes snapped menacingly as the squaws got a good look at their unwilling visitors.

The chief came out to learn the cause of the uproar. Though the Overland girls did not know it, it was Chief Wild Tree whom, a few hours previously, San Antone had knocked down with a blow from the butt of his revolver.

"Oh, Elfreda! I believe one of those squaws was the one that captured me!" whispered Grace.

"What you want?" demanded the chief, his piercing black eyes seeming to look them through.

"We wish to be directed to the camp of the Overland Riders where we belong," answered Miss Briggs.

"Why you peek on camp?" persisted the chief.

"Because we were lost and hungry and wished to see if we dared ask for assistance," volunteered Grace. "We will go on, if you please."

"You stay. You —" The words died on the lips of the roving Sioux chief, and his gaze, leveled at some object back of the Overland girls, assumed a new expression.

"You go! Me no want here. Me good

Indian — all good Indians,” he announced in a louder tone.

Grace and Elfreda instinctively turned to see what had wrought this sudden change in the chief's tone and attitude.

A man, a white man, livid of face, his eyes blazing, his shoulders hunched slightly forward, stood looking over their heads into the eyes of Chief Wild Tree. There was fear in the eyes of the chief.

“San Antone!” cried Grace Harlowe in a shrill, high-pitched voice.

“Oh, Tony! We are so glad to see you,” wailed Elfreda hysterically.

Both girls ran to the guide, but his eyes seemed blinded to their presence, and thrusting them aside with a wave of the hands, he walked between them, slowly stepping towards the chief.

“So? Ye did lie to me, did ye?” drawled the guide. “I told ye that I'd come back, but ye didn't look fer me so soon, eh? Ye low-down cayuse, you-all know what I'm goin' to do to ye now. I'm goin' to shoot ye till you-all's daid.”

“Tony!” screamed Elfreda, throwing herself on San Antone, with all her strength gripping the hand of the guide as it jerked his weapon from its holster.

There was a sharp report and Chief Wild Tree half turned, and pitched forward on his face.

CHAPTER IX

RED WOLF GIVES WARNING

“STOP! Oh, stop! You’ve killed him!” begged Grace, adding her strength to Elfreda’s in an effort to hold the gun-hand of San Antone.

“I reckon I didn’t, but I’m goin’ to,” drawled the guide. “You-all spoiled my aim,” he added, directing his voice to Miss Briggs. “The bullet jest grazed his haid, but the next ain’t goin’ to graze nothin’ — it’s goin’ clean through!”

“No, no!” protested Elfreda. “Listen to me, Tony. Listen, I tell you! This man has done nothing to us as far as we know. We were trying to find our way back to camp and came upon this Indian village. We were caught spying on them and led into their camp just a few minutes ago,” went on Elfreda rapidly.

The guide made no reply. His face was set and sullen, and his eyes left that stretched-out figure on the ground only to take a swift comprehensive glance at the sullen faces of the braves and squaws.

"See! He is coming to. Now please come away. Take us back to camp for we have had nothing to eat since the day we left," begged Elfreda.

"San Antone, if you were to do what you threaten, Emma Dean never would forgive you, and even worse than that might happen to you, for you know you have no right to shoot this man down in cold blood, bad as perhaps he may be," reminded Grace.

"Do you-all think so, Mrs. Gray?" he questioned. "I mean 'bout Miss Dean?"

"I know so," replied Grace. "Come, take us home."

"Wal, I reckon I'd bettah do thet. I got two ponies heah, and ye can both ride. Heah!"

The chief had gotten unsteadily to his feet.

"You-all," drawled San Antone, addressing Chief Wild Tree. "I reckon you-all can thank these young women that ye ain't daid. Mebby I'll do it yet," he added, motioning to the Overland girls to precede him out of the Indian village. In a few moments San Antone had assisted them into the saddles of the two ponies, then walking along beside them he listened to their story of the capture, their escape and so on up to the time of his arrival at the Indian village, which, he said, he had dropped in on hoping to catch the Indians unawares and learn something.

“Take my word fer it thet those fellers was the ones thet did the trick. They knows thet I know it. I know 'bout these redskins. I never told ye, but I was stolen by some Sioux when I was a kid. I lived with 'em till I was fourteen years old, then run away an' one day got to Texas. Then, years after thet, I come up heah an' rode the hills, an' tended cattle an' — wal, it don't make no difference now what I did. I knows Indians an' I knows their language an' I knows that these rovin' bands an' some others is bad Indians. Would ye recognize the white feller thet Miss Briggs shot at in the old smelter place, if you-all was to see him again?”

Miss Briggs was quite positive that she would.

“Thet's good. We'll get him mebbby. I only hope I'm around when ye do see him. Heah! I'm so thick thet I fergit. Here's my bag, an' there's some biscuit and things in it.”

Elfreda uttered a cry of joy.

“Tony, you have saved my life!” she exclaimed.

For the rest of the journey the girls devoted their attention principally to the food that the guide had given to them. Camp was reached sometime after midnight that night, and the Overland party, attracted by the shouts of the two returning girls, rushed out to meet them.

It was a joyous occasion, and there was no

sleep in the camp until late that night. Emma Dean was especially pleased when Grace told her that it was the mention of Emma's name that brought San Antone to defer shooting Chief Wild Tree until another day. San Antone got a radiant smile for that, but he stammered and flushed when Emma tried to make him promise not to be so hasty with his weapons thereafter.

"I can't fight. I don't know how, so what is a feller to do 'cept use his gun when he's mad at another feller?" demanded the guide.

"Tony, your philosophy — your logic, I might say — is almost as convincing as Stacy Brown's. But Stacy is a child, and you are a man, so we can't make the same allowances in your case. I can promise you one thing, and that is if you aren't good hereafter I shan't like you-all any more," finished Emma, using the guide's vernacular and imitating his southern drawl so successfully that not only the Overlanders but the guide himself laughed heartily.

Sleep that night was brief but sound. San Antone was up early, and, on his way out to water the horses, he halted suddenly and gazed down at an imprint in the soil at his very feet. The imprint was that of a man's boot, plainly made sometime during the previous night. San Antone frowned heavily and followed the boot-prints some distance from camp, where he lost them.

"I reckon Miss Dean is goin' to be disappointed in you-all, San Antone. I reckon she is, 'cause somebody'll fool 'round this heah camp once too often, an' bein' as I can't fight, I shore will hev to use my gun," he soliloquized, turning back to camp. San Antone, however, said nothing to the Overland Riders about his early morning discovery.

After breakfast the party started out. That day Hippy Wingate shot a small bear, and bear steak was in order for dinner that night. The following two days were passed without incident, during which neither white man nor Indian was seen. Even the Man in Black seemed to have deserted them. San Antone did not know whether to feel relief or regret at the lack of excitement.

It was on the third night after that, however, after the Overlanders had finished their dinner of smoked bear meat and coffee, and darkness had settled over the mountains, that something unlooked for did occur. They were encamped in a broad canyon where the air was cool and the blazing campfire brought cheer to the party, drawing forth stories of the war in which most of them had participated. Hippy was relating an incident that occurred to Grace Harlowe when she was driving an ambulance in France when suddenly Tom Gray uttered a sibilant "Sh-h-h-h!"

The soft scuff of moccasined feet was heard by all, and a new alertness flashed into the eyes of the guide as he got slowly to his feet, stretching his arms and uttering a yawn.

"Indians!" suddenly shouted Stacy Brown.

"Halt!" commanded San Antone, leveling his revolver at a clump of bushes in which a slight movement had been observable. "Advance, but be keerful how you-all do it," he ordered.

Following this command an Indian stepped from the clump of bushes and slouched slowly into the full light of the camp. His body was well hunched over in an apologetic attitude, one arm half raised as if to ward off a blow.

Stacy and Hippy recognized the newcomer instantly.

"Hello, Lady Bug!" greeted the fat boy.

"It is the 'squaw'!" announced Lieutenant Wingate wonderingly. "Texas, this is the squaw-buck that we rescued in Wild Tree's camp."

"Stand whar ye be an' let me look you-all over," drawled the guide.

The Indian crossed both hands over his breast in the sign of peace.

"Who is with you?" demanded San Antone, this time in a more severe tone, to which the Indian replied in the sign language.

"Is the man deaf and dumb?" wondered Emma innocently.

The guide shook his head, then, the Overlanders having recovered from their surprise, looked the newcomer over more carefully. The girls uttered a peal of laughter.

"Girls, girls!" rebuked Stacy. "It isn't good manners to laugh at a lady."

"No, don't make fun of him," begged Lieutenant Wingate. "He has already suffered sufficient humiliation. San Antone, see if you can find out what he wants."

The squaw-man as he stood slouched over before the fire presented a ludicrous but pathetic figure. He was clad in a soiled shirtwaist, his feet shod in old moccasins. Underneath a ragged blanket, and below a leather strap that belted the blanket, hung a tattered petticoat of fringed buckskin. The soiled calico waist bulged out from the gaping blanket above the waist. The "squaw's" head was uncovered, revealing a mop of long, coal-black hair. San Antone saw what the others did not appear to see — bruises on the face and a livid mark over the forehead.

"Who are you?" demanded the guide.

"Me squaw."

"I know thet. What's you-all's name?"

The Indian answered in his own tongue, rather to the surprise of San Antone, who could not imagine how the fellow knew that he could understand Sioux.

"He says thet his name, before his disgrace, was Red Wolf. He is now known only as the 'squaw-buck.'"

"Judging from the way he crosses his legs, I should say that he is a sawbuck," observed Stacy.

"Be quiet, little boy!" reproved Emma.

"He says he has no right to the name Red Wolf now," continued the guide, following a series of guttural explosions on the part of the Indian.

"How cruel!" cried Nora.

"What did he do to cause his disgrace?" asked Miss Briggs.

"He says thet he fainted away at a secret fire dance after he had got so many wounds thet it weakened him," San Antone informed them.

"Is it possible that such cruel practices are still indulged in?" wondered Tom Gray.

"Yes, when the Agent ain't lookin'. If the Government finds out 'bout it, it treats 'em rough, though, but he don't dare complain to the Government for fear the bucks will kill him."

"Horrible!" murmured Grace.

"I reckon the redskins don't think so. A lot of the tribes air doin' this an' worse. Squaw! What do you-all want 'round heah?"

Red Wolf did not appear to hear. At least he did not heed. He had, little by little, crept up

to Lieutenant Wingate, and crouching down on his haunches now gazed up into the face of the Overlander with worshiping eyes.

"How!" said the Wolf.

"How'dy, old man," answered Hippy jovially, smiling down into the battered face before him.

"Squaw-buck much like white man. White man brave warrior. Sioux-man 'fraid no man, 'fraid white man. How you call?"

"He means what is your name?" interpreted the guide.

"Hippy."

"Me call um Big Medicine."

"Who is your big chief?" interrupted San Antone.

"Buffalo Face him chief."

"That old scoundrel, eh?" drawled the guide, giving his belt a hitch. "Is he out hunting?"

Red Wolf nodded.

"When squaw-buck get be brave buck mebbby he kill um Buffalo Face," said the Indian stolidly.

"Serve him right if ye did. Anyhow the old rough-neck ought to be in jail."

"Why?" asked Grace.

"'Cause he's an old villain. He makes 'em think he's friendly to the Government, an' the Government believes that he stands 'tween it an' trouble with his people. Thet's whar they guess wrong, and all the while old Buffalo Face is

gettin' rich an' causin' all the trouble in this heah neck of the woods. Well, what do you-all want? "

"Me stay Big Medicine. Mebby Buffalo Face try kill Big Medicine."

"Do you mean that you are going to stay with us?" questioned Grace.

"Squaw-buck here now; squaw-buck here to-morrow. Mebby squaw-buck here all time."

"You-all got another guess comin', Squaw. We can't nohow be bothered with Indians. If thet's all you-all got to say, get out! "

"Wait!" commanded Lieutenant Wingate in an authoritative tone of voice. "Red Wolf, do you want to stay here to-night? "

The "squaw" nodded.

"All right, if no one objects I'll give you a blanket and you can tuck yourself away in our supply tent," agreed Hippy.

"Sleep by fire bymeby," grunted the Indian.

"How do you know he isn't a spy from the Indian village?" questioned Tom.

"Thet's what I've been trying to make up my mind 'bout," answered the guide.

"Would he be likely to do a thing like that after what we did for him?" wondered Hippy.

Tom said it was more than probable that the "squaw" would, as a means of restoring himself in the eyes of his tribe, but the guide now was of a different opinion. It was plain that Red

Wolf worshiped Lieutenant Wingate and Stacy, and that thenceforth he would be their devoted slave, so the Indian was rather reluctantly accepted as the Overland Riders' guest for the night. They gave him food, a warm blanket, and Red Wolf, without waiting until the others turned in, wound himself in the blanket which he drew tightly over his head, lay down by the fire and went soundly to sleep.

San Antone kept the Indian under observation until nearly morning, during which time the "squaw" never stirred. As a result of his late hours, the guide was also late in getting up next morning, and Stacy, awakened by mosquitoes, was the first to emerge from his tent, rubbing his eyes and grumbling under his breath.

"Morning, 'Sawbucks'!" he called, glancing over at the Indian, who lay motionless just as they had left him the previous evening, tightly rolled in his blanket.

"What's thet?" San Antone was wide awake on the instant and sitting up.

"I am talking to 'Sawbucks,'" replied Stacy.

"I reckon it's time the critter got up," yawned the guide.

"That is what I was thinking. I never thought that Indians were such sleepyheads. Hey! Wake up! The way you sleep, anybody would think you were dead." Two moccasined feet pro-

truded from beneath the blanket, and possessed of a sudden idea, the fat boy grabbed them and began hauling their owner out.

The man under the blanket suddenly threw it off and sat up.

“Wha — wha — at! Oh, wow!” howled Chunky, springing back, his eyes wide and staring.

It was not the Indian that his startled eyes saw. Red Wolf had disappeared, and in his place sat a white man gazing up into the eyes of the young Overland Rider.

CHAPTER X

ON THE TRAIL OF THE "DO-DO"

THE Overland Riders, awakened by Stacy Brown's shout, ran out rubbing the sleep out of their eyes.

"It's the Man in Black!" called the boy. "The Indian has turned into a white man. Wow!"

"Stranger, I reckon we've got you-all now!" drawled San Antone, standing threateningly over the queer-looking figure of the Man in Black.

The visitor wore the same long black coat, the big-rimmed smoked glasses, as when first discovered, and as he regarded the guide he replaced on his head the same lidless straw hat that Stacy and Emma of the Overland party had seen before.

"Howd'y, folks," greeted the man. "Glad to meet ye. I'm Professor Black, and —"

"Get up an' let me hev a look at ye!" commanded San Antone, as a gentle reminder pressing the muzzle of his revolver against the neck of the strange caller.

Professor Black gave no heed to the cold muzzle which he must have felt.

"I'm a rock-picker, and —"

"Good job. There are lots of rocks in this country, but I don't reckon you'll be able to pick them all up in your lifetime," observed the fat boy.

"He means that he is a geologist," interjected Tom Gray.

"Bright mind, bright mind," twinkled the professor.

"Did you really change from an Indian into a white man?" questioned Emma so innocently that the professor joined the Overlanders in a hearty laugh. San Antone, however, did not laugh. He was regarding the visitor with scowling face and suspicious gaze.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned the professor. "Mention not the roving Sioux, for even the animals of the Hills have ears," he added, rising, taking up from beside him a stout canvas bag. "My bag of tricks," he explained. "Precious samples of rocks from the Hills."

"Rocks? Is that really what you are after up here?" questioned Emma Dean shrewdly.

"Sh-h-h-h! You are clever. Draw near and I will confide in you — tell you-all, as San Antone would say, a dark secret. Rock is not all that I am in search of." The professor glanced

about him apprehensively, leaned closer to Emma, and in a loud whisper, added, "I am in search of the terrible Ippy Do-Do, the monster of the Hills, the most ferocious beast that ever preyed on human kind."

"Mercy!" gasped Emma.

Stacy's eyes grew large. San Antone ran the fingers of a hand through his shock of black hair, and the rest of the party were heard to utter soft chuckles.

"And, when you find him, what then?" grinned Tom.

"I shall smite him with my little hammer, so, and so, and so!" threatened the professor, drawing a small geologist's hammer from his bag and with it beating an imaginary Ippy Do-Do to the ground. "Tell me! Have you chanced to catch a glimpse of this terrible monster on your journeys in the Hills?"

"No, I believe not," answered Grace laughingly.

"Mr. Brown, our child member of the party, shot a beast the other day, but it turned out to be a cow — a heifer, I believe it is called," Emma soberly informed him.

"Ah! Who knows but that was a real Ippy Do-Do in disguise. Be cautious — ever on the alert, and,

“ ’Ware the brown-eyed heifer
With the soft and silken tail,
For the female of the species
Is more deadly than the male,”

finished this strange human, describing a circle in the air with his hammer, which, in its downward sweep, grazed the arm of San Antone.

The guide jumped back.

“Stranger, I’ve throw’d a gun fer less than thet,” he drawled. “It’s my opinion thet you-all air crazy, an’ somehow you-all hev got me plumb locoed. We ain’t got no place fer crazy duffers like you, so you better be on you-all’s way. An’ if you come across that Do-Do thing, you hit him hard with the hammer an’ let me know ’bout it, ’cause I’m plumb scared of thet critter,” drawled San Antone, which sally brought a shout of laughter from the Overlanders.

“There are still other perils in the Hills,” reminded the visitor soberly. “There are those who would do you injury. It is well to be on your guard and ever alert. And you, my dear young ladies, go not alone lest you again fall into evil hands,” warned the visitor, regarding Grace through his spectacles.

“You-all knows somethin’ ’bout thet, hey?” demanded San Antone sharply, taking a step towards the professor.

"I know many things — many that are hidden to the average mortal. One great secret of nature, however, is hidden from me, but I shall prove it. I shall yet discover the haunts — the lair of the terrible Ippy Do-Do. And when I do —" The professor raised his hammer, whereat San Antone stepped quickly back out of harm's way, but the professor merely dropped the hammer into his specimen bag, and giving the neck of the bag a twist, threw the receptacle over his shoulder.

"Don't go. Stay and have breakfast with us, old man," urged Hippy cordially.

"Yes, do," cried the Overlanders.

"Who knows but that you may find the long-lost Ippy Do-Do right here in our camp. I have a grave suspicion, in the light of what you say, that we at least have an offspring of that strange creature in our midst," declared Emma Dean, casting a quick, mischievous glance at Stacy Brown.

This raised another laugh, and a broad grin overspread the countenance of San Antone.

"San Antonio, Texas, are you a 'Do-Do'?" demanded Chunky, solemnly eyeing the guide.

"I reckon thet mebbly I might be most anythin'," answered San Antone a little doubtfully. "I'm so locoed already thet I don't reckon much 'bout anythin'."

"Will you stay and eat with us?" urged Miss Briggs.

"I thank you. I must be on my way — the way that leads to the everywhere and the nowhere — for it is said that the early morn is the hour that the monster may be expected to be abroad. I bid you farewell."

The strange creature, well bent over under the load of rocks that his bag was supposed to hold, trotted away, and as he left the camp behind him he began to sing:

"For the Ippy Do-Do is a rare old bird,
A rare old bird is he.
Ippy-dippy di; Ippy-dippy do,
Ippy-Dippy Do-Do dee."

His voice soon trailed away into a distant murmur, then was lost altogether.

The Overland Riders looked at each other, then burst out laughing, but San Antone, recovering from his amazement, uttered an exclamation and started to follow Professor Black.

"Tony! Come back here. Where are you going?" demanded Tom Gray.

"I'm goin' to wing thet bird. There's too many things roamin' 'round these heah Hills already," called back the guide, breaking into a fast run.

CHAPTER XI

“BUFFALO FACE HIM COME!”

AS he ran out the guide passed a thick clump of bushes just beyond the camp, and in these bushes lay Professor Black, chuckling to himself as the irate Texan sped past him.

A few moments later, responding to the shrill calls for “Tony!” uttered by Emma Dean, the guide returned red of face and surly, again passing the hidden geologist, on his way into camp. Experienced trailer that he was, “Tex” was no match for the professor, who, after the guide had returned to camp, got up and walked calmly on his way, after having dumped all the “specimens” from his bag into the bushes.

“I’ll get thet bird next time!” promised San Antone.

“Now, Tony! Surely you would not shoot a person just because that person happened to be crazy, would you?” teased Emma.

“I shore would, Miss Dean. The likes of thet bird ain’t safe to be let wander.”

"Look here, San Antone. Listen to me! You are altogether too quick with your gun. Some day you are going to meet a fellow who is even quicker, then your good friends will be talking about 'how life-like' you look," warned Lieutenant Wingate. "The professor may be crazy, but at times some of us haven't exhibited much greater sanity than he does."

"Yes, I could name persons right here in this camp who possess much less sense than Professor Black," averred Emma. "But their fault is that they are brainless while he, poor fellow, may have plenty of brains —"

"But they got twisted, eh?" laughed Grace.

"Dear people, you are all wrong," spoke up Elfreda. "That man is no crazier than I am, and —"

"Fortunate man," murmured Emma, whereupon the Overlanders had a hearty laugh at the expense of J. Elfreda.

"It is my opinion that Professor Black is far from being so crazy as he would have us believe," continued Miss Briggs. "I believe that he is assuming it for a purpose; and, somehow, at times I seem to catch a familiar note in his voice. Perhaps you folks observed that he pitches it rather high, but that occasionally he forgets himself and lets it down ever so little. That indicates to me that the high voice isn't his natural voice."

"I agree with you," declared Grace with some emphasis.

"Great head! Wonderful reasoning power," observed Stacy Brown under his breath. "When do we eat? We can't all wait to catch an Ippy Do-Do. What is that beast, anyway?"

"There ain't no such thing," interjected the guide heatedly. "Thet's all moonshine fodder."

"That's so. We haven't had breakfast, have we?" cried Hippy. "Strange that I should overlook a little matter like that. Nora, will you kindly see if there is anything loose about this camp? I'm famished and Stacy is almost speechless; he is weak from lack of food."

"How fortunate!" retorted Emma.

At breakfast that morning the principal topics of discussion were Professor Black and Red Wolf, whose mysterious disappearance bothered the Overlanders not a little. Their conclusion was that the Wolf had gotten up and left early, and that the Man in Black had appropriated his place by the fire.

After breakfast preparations for a resumption of the journey were immediately begun and the party soon were in their saddles. The day's ride was a pleasant one. Twice during the morning they saw smoke from camp-fires, which the guide studied frowningly, finally announcing that the smoke was not from Indian fires.

"Too much smudge," averred San Antone. "An Indian fire is a small fire, an' if there's smoke it's thin an' white if there ain't no wind. See that cloud of smoke off yonder?" he questioned, pointing. "That's coal smoke from Deadwood."

"Deadwood?" wondered Chunky. "I once read a book about a fellow by the name of Deadwood. Let me see, what was it? Deadwood — Deadwood —"

"Never mind, little boy. Your questionable literary tastes were better kept to yourself," rebuked Emma.

Deadwood lies in the deep gulches of the Whitewood and Deadwood creeks, not far from Fort Meade, and all that could be seen of the old mining town, until one were actually upon it, was the smoke from its chimneys.

"Why, this town seems to have caved in at the middle!" exclaimed Emma as they rode into it later in the day.

"I was going to say that myself. You took the words out of my mouth," objected Stacy sourly.

"Perish the thought!" retorted Emma airily.

Deadwood they found, upon arrival, to be a typical mining town. Stamp mills and smelters were everywhere. The buildings along the main street were low, familiar types to the Overland

Riders who were coming to know their western country well.

"It ain't the old Deadwood," said San Antone. "In them days you folks would hev been doin' a tenderfoot dance, with a dozen six-shooters kickin' up the dust under your feet, long before this."

The Overland Riders were glad of the opportunity to form a mental picture of the town that had been the scene of so much bloodshed and crime in the early mining days of that region. Their mental pictures they could easily visualize in the light of some of their own more recent experiences.

The call at Deadwood lasted only long enough for the Overlanders to take on provisions, after which they climbed the mountain on the opposite side of the town, and for some distance, after reaching the top, they rode past rude mining houses, mills, pits, and holes in the ground, every foot of which had been prospected, and, in most instances, mined.

"Is there gold up here?" questioned Chunky.

"I reckon thar's tin here, but no gold," answered the guide.

"I don't want tin. It reminds me too much of my aunt's kitchen."

Camp was made about fifteen miles from Deadwood. It was pitched on the side of a moun-

tain, a rugged, lonely place that seemed a long way from civilization. Good water was found near at hand, and excellent browsing for the horses, which led the guide to decide to spend the night there.

"Well, where is your squaw-buck, Tony?" asked Tom as they sat down to their dinner.

"Don't worry. Reddy will be around to see me one of these days," answered Lieutenant Wingate before the guide had opportunity to speak.

"I reckon we air lucky if he don't come back with a party of regular bucks. Then we shore will hev some lively doin's," grumbled San Antone.

"If that be true perhaps it would be wise for us to hustle ourselves at once. Red Wolf is here now!" announced Elfreda Briggs.

San Antone bounded to his feet. Just beyond the row of tents stood the slouching figure of the squaw-buck. Red Wolf had made no change in his appearance, though his attitude did indicate that he had come far, and his hungry look showed that he wanted food.

"Hello, Lady Bug!" greeted Chunky.

"Who air heah with you?" demanded the guide brusquely.

"Me come 'lone," answered the Indian.

"Where did you get thet gun?" The question

was put sternly. The Overlanders only then observed that their caller carried a rifle, which bucks in disgrace are not allowed to do. In this instance, Red Wolf carried the weapon with the muzzle trailing on the ground.

"Me get um Buffalo Face."

"Where is he?"

"One, two sun away. Him come soon."

"You stole thet rifle, Squaw!" accused San Antone.

"Mebby. Mebby not so. You no care."

"No. I don't give a rap 'bout thet. If you-all got it from old Buffalo Face, so much the better."

Red Wolf skulked and hunched himself up to Lieutenant Wingate where he crouched as on his previous visit, and said "How!"

Hippy acknowledged the greeting.

"You say Buffalo Face is coming after us, Reddy?" he questioned.

"Um! Buffalo Face him come."

"I suppose he is coming to drive us out of his preserves, eh?" questioned Stacy.

"Ho! Mebby him shoot Big Medicine. Him mad. Wild Tree mad — all mad! Red Wolf know."

"Coming here?" exclaimed Elfreda.
"When?"

"To-morrow," grunted the Indian. "You go! Him kill."

CHAPTER XII

A RED MAN'S GRATITUDE

NORA WINGATE uttered a wail.
“I reckoned on thet,” growled San Antone.

“So did I, and I believe this fellow is responsible for his coming,” declared Tom Gray.

“No! Tom, he has come to warn us. Don’t you understand?” rebuked Grace. “No white man could show gratitude in a better way.”

“Never mind the gratitude part of this affair. The question before us is what shall we do? What does Buffalo Face want?” he demanded, turning to the “squaw.”

“Him want Big Medicine.”

“Do you not think it would appease his anger were we to turn Stacy over to him?” questioned Emma with well-feigned innocence.

The laugh that her suggestion caused quickly died away.

“Did they christen old Buffalo Face in Buffalo, New York, or did he get the name from the way you got his rifle?” asked Chunky.

Red Wolf shook his head.

"Bucks him come hunting. Squaws and papoose go Agency," grunted the Indian.

"Thet looks bad, sir," declared the guide, turning to Tom Gray. "If the bucks air goin' alone, leavin' the squaws to follow another trail to the Agency, it means thet Buffalo Face an' his braves air up to mischief. Of course mebbby they air only goin' after game to keep them in fresh meat while they are at the Agency, or they may be goin' alone 'cause they are after somebody," reflected San Antone.

"Where can we be by that time?" asked Grace Harlowe. "I mean by the time this thing occurs?"

"If we don't move till mornin' we ought to be tother side of Sundance Mountain. Leastwise, I'm headin' fer the Agency at Pine Ridge. They's somethin' goin' on thar an' I reckon mebbby we'll be interested in it. Does Buffalo or Wild Tree know thet you hev come this way?" he demanded, turning to the Indian.

"Not know."

"Whar does he-all think ye air?" persisted San Antone.

"Me sleep in Hills, get 'way from squaw. He know um."

"Oh! He thinks you-all hev run away to the Hills to hide," answered the guide scowlingly.

Red Wolf nodded gravely, arranging his skirts about his thin, muscular legs.

"Did you go back to your people when you left us?" asked Lieutenant Wingate.

"Me go."

"What fer?" demanded the guide.

"Squaw-buck want know what Chief Wild Tree do. Mebby chief want make bad medicine for Big Medicine," he replied, gazing up at Hippy. "Me go Buffalo Face, too."

"And you stole Buffalo's rifle?" chuckled Lieutenant Wingate.

"You took it, borrowed it, helped yourself, appropriated the rifle. Is that it, 'Sawbucks'?" interrupted Stacy.

"Me take um."

"Of course you did. He took um!" Stacy nodded understandingly to his companions. "What are you going to do with it?"

"Not know. Mebby squaw-buck kill Buffalo Face!"

"And mebby, if you do a thing like that, they will hang you at the Agency," warned Miss Dean. "I am not quite positive that I like this country. It is so unexpected."

"You said thet Buffalo Face could not get to us in less than one, two suns, mebby," reminded the guide, still scowling at their visitor. "Don't you-all know thet he could make it in half thet

time? I reckon you-all made more'n forty mile in gettin' heah, an' I reckon you-all didn't run you-all's laigs off doin' it."

The "squaw" grunted.

"Braves no follow trail all way."

Grace asked what the fellow meant. San Antone asked him in Sioux; then, as a guttural reply was made, the guide's face relaxed into a broad smile.

"Thar's strategy fer ye. I takes back all I said 'bout this heah redskin. He says thet he made a false trail — thet he left an Indian sign on a tree showin' thet we had taken the lower trail to the southeast so thet we might hev open an' easy travelin' after we got past Deadwood. If he-all has done thet an' the bucks don't heah from their scouts thet it ain't true, we'll be a long way from heah by the time they wakes up."

"Hurrah for 'Sawbucks'!" cried Chunky, tossing his hat in the air.

"Be quiet, child," admonished Emma.

"Quiet nothing! Say, I'll tell you what I'll do, 'Sawbucks.' I'll lend you a pair of my pants and a shirt, but you've got to wash yourself before you put them on."

"Oh, Stacy, that's fine of you," approved Nora. The Wolf shook his head slowly.

"No take. Me squaw-buck."

"He dare not do it," spoke up San Antone.

"He-all wouldn't dare be seen in white folks' clothes. If he war to do thet his people would know thet he had deserted them an' some mornin' he'd be found daid. We'll take his word an' I reckon you better turn in. I'll watch the camp."

"Me watch," grunted the Indian.

"Is there no danger?" questioned Nora apprehensively.

"Squaw-buck here. Chief no come when Big Medicine him sleep. Squaw-buck him watch. Him kill Buffalo Face, Buffalo Face wake Big Medicine!"

"He means he'll keep watch through the night, an' that if the chief comes foolin' round heah an' wakes up the lieutenant, he-all will kill the old ruffian."

"Whatever you do, Mister Indian, please don't make a mistake and hit this little boy," urged Emma, turning towards Stacy. "He is our most prized curiosity."

Laughing, despite the seriousness of their position, the Overland Riders began preparing for bed, with the understanding that a start was to be made as soon after daylight as possible. Nora reminded them that Red Wolf must be hungry.

"No eat," he grunted when asked if he had had his dinner.

"He probably hasn't had much of anythin' to eat since he was heah," the guide informed them.

Red Wolf, being directed to go to the spring and wash his face, did so, dragging his rifle after him. He soon returned, his face dripping and water splashed all over him. Stacy regarded the bedraggled visitor with disapproval in his eyes.

“‘Sawbucks,’ we didn’t tell you to take a bath. Why didn’t you dry your face and hands.”

“Fire dry um,” grunted the “squaw,” edging up to the campfire. He preferred to sit by the fire and let the water dry in. This amused the Overlanders, though they managed to keep from laughing outright, not desiring to hurt the feelings of one who had done them so great a service.

The Wolf ate ravenously. He did not take time to chew his food, but gulped it down whole.

“Do you always eat like that?” questioned Emma.

“They all do,” said San Antone.

After cleaning his plate, the Indian strode from camp without a word and was seen there no more that night. San Antone stalked him for some little distance, and watched until he saw the Indian take a position on a rock for a night’s vigil. The guide knew that it would not be well for any stranger to prowl about in that vicinity, so he returned and turned in.

The camp was astir and under way before daylight next morning. A brief halt was made for luncheon. Up to that time there had been no

Indian signs, nor had a single human being been seen. During the afternoon San Antone looked continuously for a suitable camping place, and about four o'clock he found what he was looking for, a site on a rise of ground, screened by rocks and commanding a wide view. There was water and excellent grazing for the ponies, and there they made their camp for the night.

That night the guide, with Hippy Wingate, stood guard, but there was no need for their vigilance, for the camp was undisturbed; but on the following morning when Hippy went to the spring to wash his face he made a discovery that amazed him. Tacked to a stump just above the spring was a sheet of paper. As he read the warning written thereon, Lieutenant Wingate uttered an exclamation.

Without waiting to dry his face, the Overlander hurried back to his companions, waving the sheet of paper.

"Someone has been here!" he shouted.
"Listen to this, you amateurs:"

"Overland Riders! You are heading for trouble. Better change your course, bearing to the right. Go straight to Elkhorn Ranch, then due east, avoiding gulches, keeping to the ridges. Indians on the trail you are following. Wild Tree and his tribe and others all heading for the Agency. Better take matters up with Indian

Agent when you reach there. Keep your guns loaded and your feet warm, and watch white men as well as Indians. Good luck! ' "

No name was signed to the mysterious message.

" I don't like this mystery business," declared Elfreda Briggs severely. " Why should the writer desire to be so secretive? "

" It's that Do-Do man! " averred Nora. " He is crazy! "

" I don't believe it is that man at all," differed Emma. " Had he anything to say, I reckon he would come right into camp and say it. It is someone else."

During breakfast the Overlanders held a conference over the warning, and chided Lieutenant Wingate and San Antone for permitting a prowler to come close to the camp and write a letter to them. The two men were considerably disturbed, and Hippy's face was red, but that of the guide was surly.

" The very next time you two are so careless we shall be obliged to select someone else to act as sentry," teased Grace.

" Ain't goin' to be no next time," growled Tex.

" That doesn't mean that you are expected to shoot up every person who calls on us," reminded Emma. " You know it might be someone whom we very much wished to see," she added amid laughter.



“Smoke!”

Before they had finished breakfast the Overlanders concluded to follow the suggestion of the unknown writer, and San Antone, after taking an observation, decided upon the route they should take. The Riders were under way soon after that.

Sundance Mountain, a famous Indian landmark of the days of savage warfare, loomed into view shortly after the Overlanders had started out on their day's ride. By noon they were well into the cattle country, and during the afternoon they caught distant views of thousands of cattle grazing on the mountains and in the valleys. Here and there cattle outfits were met up with, the Riders in each instance inquiring if Indians had been seen, but none had been discovered by the cattle men.

Sundance Mountain, rock-flanked, level-topped like a great stage, excited the wonder of the Overland Riders. They could almost fancy seeing the Indians up there performing their savage religious dances in the days of long ago. Then, finally, in the very shadow of the mountain they came upon the little town of Sundance, but they remained there only long enough to purchase eggs and sufficient other fresh provisions to last until they reached the Agency at Pine Ridge. There were some Indians to be seen in the town, mostly squaws, but these appeared to give no heed to the strangers.

Camp was made that day as the sun was sinking behind the Hills, and as they paused in their work of pitching the tents they observed the guide regarding the top of the mountain with interest.

"Smoke!" he announced briefly, noting the inquiry in their glances.

Lazy, drifting curls of it waved high in the air over Sundance Mountain. The Overlanders, inexperienced in these matters as they were, could see that there was system in the intervals at which these wavy smoke-rings were being released into the air.

For some time no word was spoken, then Emma Dean, placing a hand on the guide's arm, looked anxiously up into his face.

"What is it, Tony?" she asked a bit uneasily.

"Indians!" answered San Antone. "Pack up in a hurry! I can't be shore, but mebbey the critters hev discovered us."

CHAPTER XIII

STACY "SPILLS THE BEANS"

“**W**HERE are we going?” questioned Tom Gray anxiously.

“Straight ahead. We’ll make Elk Horn Ranch by sun-up if we air lucky, an’ thar we’ll be out of reach of the redskins. They won’t dare do nothin’ to us so close to the Agency. Don’t show no lights nor do any yellin’.”

A brief hesitation followed the guide’s orders, then the Overland Riders sprang to the task of breaking camp and loading their equipment on the pack ponies. Darkness came on while they were still engaged in this work, but soon after that all was secure and the Riders were in their saddles, jogging slowly away, San Antone in the lead rigidly riding his saddle, alert, stern-faced and ready for trouble.

The night was changing and sweetening the air, which had been close and trying all that day, but the minds of the Overlanders were too full of other things to give much heed to the fragrance of the air or the beauty of the night.

Hippy Wingate was at the rear of the line of the Overlanders, who were riding in single file, when suddenly a voice from the bushes close at hand startled him. Lieutenant Wingate's revolver was out of its holster in an instant.

"Who is it? Speak quick or I'll shoot!"

"Big Medicine! Me squaw!"

"Fiddlesticks! Reddy, one of these times you will get shot. You nearly got it as it was. Helloa, ahead there! Pass the word to Texas that Red Wolf is here."

"Where you go?"

"Wait! The guide will be here in a moment. I will let him answer you. Here he comes, now. Tex, here's Red, who wishes to know where we are going. You tell him."

"You see um smoke?" grunted the Indian.

"Yes. Whose war it?" demanded the guide.

"Buffalo Face."

"Is he up heah?"

The "squaw" shook his head.

"Buck him scout. Him try find Big Medicine in valley. Big Medicine on mountain. Him smoke no good. Big Medicine him sly like fox. Huh!"

"Then thet fellow making smoke signals on Sundance war a scout, eh?" reflected San Antone.

"Ho! Chief Wild Tree him on other side mountain. Him look Big Medicine, too."

"They air on two sides of us, Lieutenant. The squaw don't think thet Chief Buffalo got his scout's smoke signals. Squaw, where is Chief Buffalo goin'?"

"Agency. Not know where Chief Wild Tree go."

"So? We air goin' to the Agency ourselves, Red."

"Good! Me think mebbby you go down in gulch. Wild Tree him catch there. Me come say go Agency way. Big Medicine much big."

"He thinks I did it all," commented Hippy, laughing. "How long before we shall be in the open?"

"'Bout two hours from heah. Then we'll shore be all right. The redskins air 'fraid of their hides, an' they won't tackle us unless they can catch us nappin' in a place whar they could get away with it. If the Government got them, they knows it would hang the lot of them. We'll tell the Agent all 'bout what's been doin', eh?"

"I think not. I shall have to talk with the rest of the party before giving you a definite answer. Tex, we have always fought our own battles, and I reckon we can do so now. Are you with us?"

"In a hoss race, Lieutenant," drawled San Antone.

Moving to the head of the line, after a "How!"

to the Indian, the guide waved to the Overlanders to follow along, they first having been informed of what Red Wolf had said. The Indian, however, continued on with the outfit, but kept some distance to one side of them. He rejoined them shortly after daybreak next morning when they halted in the open to make camp for breakfast.

While Red Wolf, squatting on the ground, ate his breakfast alone, his hosts plied him with questions. They learned that Buffalo Face had been lured from the real trail for a time, that he had sent out his scouts to search for the Overlanders in the Hills, but that he had not succeeded up to the time the smoke signals were made on Sundance Mountain. The probabilities were that he had not yet gotten the information for which he was seeking.

"Would he really fight us, do you think?" wondered Miss Briggs.

"Mebby fight for Big Medicine. You give um Big Medicine, no care 'bout other."

"Now that is exactly what we wished to know. It simplifies matters, indeed. We now know how to proceed to stop this hide and seek game we have been playing," averred Emma.

"Eh?" wondered Chunky.

"All we shall have to do when the gentleman from Buffalo starts something is to give him what he comes for — give Hippy Wingate to him, then

there will be nothing for him to fight for. Some of us might feel a little regret that it was Hippy instead of his nephew, but we might do worse. Hippy, shall I pack your kit for you and have everything in readiness?" questioned Emma mischievously.

"The only kit that I shall need packed is my rifle, and I reckon I will pack that myself. Hey! Where's Red?"

The Indian had disappeared while the Overlanders were directing their attention to Lieutenant Wingate, but before they could comment on his disappearance a horseman rode into camp, sweeping off his sombrero when he discovered that there were women in the party.

"Wal, Stranger, who might you-all be?" drawled San Antone.

"I was about to ask you the same question," answered the horseman laughingly. "I'm Ben Jones, Superintendent of the Elk Horn Ranch. I saw smoke over here and thought maybe it was Indians. I was goin' to tell 'em to be on their way. You're welcome to camp on the Elk Horn Ranch as long as you wish," he added, smiling and nodding at the Overland girls.

Tom Gray stepped forward and introduced himself, and then introduced the rest of his party.

"And this is San Antone, our guide," added Tom, waving a hand towards the Texan.

The superintendent gave the guide a quick, keen look.

"I reckon I've heard of you before, Bennett," he answered carelessly.

"We were just eating breakfast, so sit right in with us," invited Hippy.

"Don't mind if I do have a snack with ye. Where you headin'?"

Grace told him who they were and why they were riding the Black Hills, and asked him if any Indians had been seen in that vicinity. Jones said no, but that one of his men farther west had seen a whole tribe of them heading for the Agency, and that another had made out what looked to be smoke signals on Sundance Mountain.

"What do you-all reckon they air goin' to the Agency fer?" asked the guide.

"There is to be a council there, some grievance. Beyond that I don't know. I reckon, though, that there's somethin' in the air, for I understand the council was called rather unexpectedly. Someone said Old Buffalo Face had been up to mischief, but I don't know what it is. He's a bad one."

"I reckon thar's some white men in these heah parts thet's jest as bad," volunteered San Antone.

"Yes. I reckon so," answered Ben Jones, regarding the guide with a wry smile, under which

San Antone flushed. "At least there are some strange stories told of them, including cattle-rustling. We've lost some stock that way from the ranges and our rangers are instructed to shoot any rustlers on sight."

"You have a foreman named Oakley, haven't you?" asked Tom Grey.

"An assistant foreman," corrected the superintendent.

"A fellow who claimed he was Oakley, but that San Antone said wasn't, got run out of our camp," volunteered Stacy Brown.

"How is that?"

"Well, it was this way," went on Stacy, disregarding the warning glances of his companions. "My Uncle Hippy Wingate and I were out hunting, and we shot what we thought was a deer. It wasn't a deer at all. It was a heifer."

"What kind of a heifer?" interjected the superintendent, instantly on the alert.

"A brown one. She had an 'E. K.' brand on her right hip."

"One of our strays! You don't say?" nodded Jones.

"Yes. And what do you think? We had no more than got back to camp before a fellow named Swinton came in claiming that we had shot his cow and wanted his pay for her. It seems he had bought her from your ranch and —

"Stacy, give Mr. Jones a chance to talk about something else," suggested Emma Dean. "He isn't interested in our personal affairs."

"Well. We paid the fellow thirty dollars for the heifer and ten dollars more for the trouble he had been put to. It was after he had left that the other fellow claiming to be Jim Oakley put in an appearance, but San Antone knew he was a fake from the start, 'cause he knew Oakley by sight and —"

"Young man, that critter didn't belong to the Swinton party at all. She was a stray from the Elk Horn Ranch and we been lookin' for her ever since. You say you shot her?"

"I did. I broke her back with the first shot. I call that some shooting at her distance away," answered the fat boy boastfully.

"Then seeing that you admit it, and while I'm sorry you got stung, I reckon it'll cost you fifty dollars more, young man. That was a blooded animal that we reckoned on keepin' and you'll have to pay for her," declared Ben Jones in a severe tone.

"Oh, Stacy! You surely have spilled the beans," muttered Emma under her breath, while Hippy Wingate was heard to mutter, "Poor fish!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE GATHERING OF THE BRAVES

A N embarrassed silence followed, then the Overlanders burst out laughing.

“Well, well! Fate plays strange pranks, doesn’t it?” cried Hippy jovially. “Of course we will pay for the cow, and we thank you for telling us that the animal belonged to you. Who is this fellow Swinton who collected the first payment for the beast? I think we should like to meet him.”

“What did he look like?” questioned the superintendent.

Hippy described the man, but Ben Jones merely shook his head. The description failed to identify the man. After breakfast, Lieutenant Wingate handed over the money for the cow, saying he was thankful that he did not pay the second man who called at the camp demanding money for the animal.

San Antone regarded the entire incident with scowling visage. He was angry. He considered that Ben Jones’ demands were an outrage after

the party had paid for the cow once, but the guide held himself in check. Soon after breakfast the superintendent bade the Overlanders good-bye, but urged them to accompany him to the ranch-house and have luncheon with him at noon. They declined.

"You see we have an irresponsible boy with this outfit, and it really would not be prudent to let him go where there are so many cows. He might think they were deer," explained Emma soberly.

The Overland Riders' chagrin was soon overcome by their saving sense of humor, and the last leg of their journey to the Agency was begun with all hands, except the guide, chaffing Lieutenant Wingate and Stacy Brown for their heroic achievement in killing a cow.

Shortly after noon they rode out on an open rolling plain that stretched away for miles, and shortly after gaining the plain they began to see scattered groups of Indians, many with blankets drawn over their heads, riding leisurely towards the Agency. Some were on foot, the squaws staggering under the packs they were carrying, the bucks sauntering along with no burdens at all.

"Is there danger of their bothering us?" questioned Nora apprehensively.

The guide shook his head.

"We air too near the Agency. They don't dare, but we'll look them over."

"An Indian is the laziest mortal alive," declared Grace.

"With possibly one exception," corrected Emma, glancing carelessly at Stacy Brown.

"Oh, I don't know. If the squaws are willing to tote the packs why should the bucks object?" asked the fat boy.

"I think you will now admit, folks, that my point is well taken," retorted Emma.

The Indians appeared to give no heed to the white Riders, but the guide knew Indians, and thoroughly understood that the Overland Riders were under close observation.

"Thar's the Agency," he called out, late in the afternoon, pointing to a low frame building sadly in need of a coat of paint. Its windows, they found as they rode up, were smoky and dirty with the dust of the plain that seemed to be ground into the glass itself. In front of the building, nailed fast to the structure, were benches for waiting Indians to sit on. These benches were seldom empty. Bucks met there to loaf in the sunshine, to grunt out what they had to say, as well as to observe who was passing in and out of the Agency and to wonder why, for the Indian is a curious being, notwithstanding his appearance to the contrary.

Here and there the Overland Riders saw groups of tepees. Children played about them; squaws were seen packing bundles of dead wood from a grove near by, bent over under their heavy burdens. Their braves were smoking and grunting about the campfires that were crackling before each individual group of tepees, while the women were gathering and fetching fuel for these same fires. The Overland Riders looked on in strong disapproval.

"How I would like to give those lazy bucks a good sound thrashing," declared Nora indignantly.

"Be careful, folks, that you don't stir up them Indians," warned the guide. "The Government lets them do 'bout as they please so long as they don't walk over the line that the big White Father in Washington has marked out for them."

"It is a pity that the White Father wouldn't set them to work," retorted Nora.

"A lot of 'em do work," the guide informed her. "Others will never be nothing but savages. We'll make camp in the grove where the squaws is gatherin' firewood," he directed, heading off to the right towards the site indicated by him.

"While it ain't strictly necessary, some of you folks better stop off an' see the Agent. His name is Jones, too, but if he ain't there, see his assistant, Comstock.

They found Mr. Comstock standing in front of the Agency with a group of Indians about him. He was listening to a story that a squaw was telling him about a sick cow. The Overlanders understood that she feared the cow would die. The Acting Agent told her he was sorry, but that he was not a cow doctor.

The Overland party had dismounted and stepped over to the group the better to hear the conversation.

"Pardon me, sir," spoke up Emma Dean courteously. "I understand the woman to say that she has a sick cow. We have a young man in our party who is something of a horse doctor. At least he has been quite successful with our ponies, though the only cow I know of his attending, died. I would suggest that he might be able, at least, to determine what ails the cow," she added, indicating Lieutenant Wingate by a nod in his direction.

Hippy's face grew red, and the Overlanders chuckled.

"Is it far from here?" persisted Emma.

"No. She has the animal with her, I believe."

Tom Gray at this juncture stepped forward, and, after introducing himself, did the same for the rest of the party. The Acting Agent shook hands cordially and said he would be glad to show them all there was to be seen at the Agency.

"But, about this cow, Mr. — Mr. Wingate. Would you really see what you can do for the woman?"

"For the cow, not the squaw," suggested Stacy.

"She is much distressed, and, being a poor squaw, cannot afford to lose the animal."

"I'm no cow doctor," exploded Hippy, then begged the Acting Agent's pardon.

"Yes. Go on. You can pass for a regular one whether the cow lives or dies," urged Miss Briggs laughingly.

"Is that the way you practice law?" demanded Hippy amid the laughter of the Overlanders.

"Well, I must admit that we lawyers have to be rather expert guessers on occasions."

"Sure, my Hippy will look the cow over," promised Nora.

"Thank you!" The Acting Agent directed the woman to lead Lieutenant Wingate to the cow, which she started to do after first wrapping her head in a brightly colored blanket.

The entire Overland outfit accompanied them, and as they walked away leading their ponies, the party was joined by bucks and squaws and children, all curious to see what the Big Medicine Man would do.

"This is a fine deal you folks have pulled off on me," protested Lieutenant Wingate. "Emma,

that is one that I owe you. Tex, please ask the woman how the beast acts."

This the guide did in Sioux, and Hippy listened with appropriate gravity to the answer that was returned to him.

"I think I know what ails her," observed Hippy.

"Do your prettiest, Hippy," crooned Emma. "Remember, not only your own, but also the reputation of the Overland Riders depends upon your success. Stacy will hold her head while you are operating on the beast, won't you, little boy?"

"I will not!" answered the fat boy angrily.

They found the cow standing in a disconsolate attitude, nose lowered to the ground, wheezing like a leaky flue of a steam engine.

"Ask the squaw what she has been feeding the cow," demanded Hippy after feeling the animal's neck.

"She says nothin'," the guide informed him.

"Get me two small pieces of wood and a stone that I can handle. I don't suppose anyone has a hammer." Once in possession of the desired objects, Lieutenant Wingate placed a block of wood on either side of the cow's neck at a point where a slight enlargement was observable, hit one block a sharp rap with the stone, then began massaging the neck with both hands.

The cow gave a sudden cough and something shot from her mouth.

"A potato! Wal, I'm plumb beat 'bout thet," exclaimed San Antone.

"Am I a cow doctor? Well, I reckon I am," announced Hippy rather boastfully.

"Hippy, dear! Never in your life did you speak a truer word," approved Emma.

"Tell that squaw that hereafter she had better cut up the potatoes she feeds to her cow," directed Lieutenant Wingate. "Why does she look at me that way?"

"She-all thinks you-all is a magician, one of them sleight-of-hand fellers," answered San Antone, grinning broadly.

"Huh!" grunted Hippy, as they turned back to the Agency on their way to their camp site.

"Well, did you cure the cow?" asked the Acting Indian Agent as they came up to him.

"Yes. The animal was choking on a potato in the windpipe," answered Hippy.

"She was? I reckon I'll have to look into that. The only potatoes about here at this time of the year are those of my own private supply."

"Perhaps you had better count your Murphys then, sir," suggested Hippy.

"So you cured the cow, eh? Well, well."

"Yes, he made her cough up," volunteered Stacy, and Mr. Comstock laughed heartily.

"I prophesy that you will have your hands full if you stay around here. How long shall you be here?"

Tom informed him that they probably would remain at the Agency a few days at least.

"I am glad of that. You will be here to see the Omaha, then. Perhaps you know that this is the native Indian dance. The Indians are coming in for it now. The dance will take place the day after to-morrow at night. I shall be pleased to have you folks take dinner with me this evening," added the Acting Agent.

Grace replied that they couldn't think of imposing on him to that extent, but that she and her husband and probably others of the Overland party would call at his home before they left the reservation.

"Too bad that I don't dance," complained Stacy after they had left Mr. Comstock and were at work making camp in the grove.

"Persons who have elephant feet seldom do dance," replied Emma airily.

"Miss Dean, I'll guarantee that I can out-dance you any night in the week. If I wished to I could dance you to death before the intermission period," retorted Chunky hotly.

"I thought you just said that you couldn't dance," answered Emma sweetly.

"I—I don't. I mean I didn't. I— What

kind of a fandango is this Omaha, Nebraska, affair? ”

“ It is the native dance at which only the bucks take part,” answered the guide. “ I reckon you’ll think it’s the liveliest shindy thet you ever come up with. In the old days the braves used to dance the Omaha before goin’ out to meet their enemies. It kinder works up their enthusiasm, you know. Thar’s another name fer it—the Grass Dance. In those days the Indians used to go into battle with their bodies covered with bunches of grass. In thet way they sometimes could ambush their enemies by makin’ ’em think the bunches of grass they saw war real, an’ it’s thet thet give the Omaha the name of Grass Dance.”

“ Well, well. Look who’s here! ” interrupted Stacy. “ If it isn’t our old friend ‘Sawbucks.’ ”

Red Wolf, with back humped, the picture of woe, was carrying a pack of wood on his back, each hand carrying a pail of water. His mourning blanket had dropped from his shoulders, and was hanging from the belt, one end dragging on the ground behind him.

“ Reddy is a squaw again,” exclaimed Hippy.

“ I call that a burning shame! ” cried Nora.

“ Don’t speak to him,” warned San Antone. “ I reckon thet if he wants you-all to do so he’ll let you know. I wonder why he’s here. I don’t

see anythin' of Chief Wild Tree, an' I'm right sorry 'bout thet. Mebby thet old critter is waitin' fer us to get out of the way. Somehow he don't look to meetin' up with me. I feel right cut up 'bout thet—I shore do," drawled the guide, greatly to the amusement of his party.

That Red Wolf had his own good reasons for being there, the guide well knew—the others did not, but they learned later. They learned further, too, to what extent the faithfulness of a grateful Indian could go.

CHAPTER XV

STACY CHARMS "MOON FACE"

CAMPFIRES flickered and glowed in the darkness as night settled over the scene, and lights sprang up in the tepees. Dogs yelped, and the murmur of guttural speech was borne faintly to the ears of the Overland Riders.

"What a scene!" breathed Elfreda Briggs. "I never saw anything so fairy-like."

"I should not say that there is anything particularly fairy-like about it," differed Grace laughingly.

"I know that. I am simply remarking the impression on one who never before has seen its like. It seems to me that there are now more tepees than when we came in."

"Thar be," agreed San Antone, who, in passing the two girls, had heard Miss Briggs' remark. "The braves air comin' in fer keeps now, an' they'll keep on comin'."

"Should not someone watch the camp to-night, Hippy?" asked Grace.

"Big Medicine him no watch! Squaw-buck him watch like owl in tree," grunted a voice close at hand. The voice was directly behind Stacy, who gave a sudden lurch forward as if someone had pushed him from behind.

"Look here, 'Sawbucks'! Don't be so confounded sudden. Hereafter, knock before you enter. You nearly scared the wits out of me," complained Stacy Brown sourly.

"Is Buffalo Face or Wild Tree here?" demanded San Antone.

"No here. Buffalo Face him come. Mebby not till to-morrow; mebby not to-morrow."

"Where is your rifle?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate.

The Wolf answered merely with a grunt.

"He knows better than to bring it here," spoke up San Antone. "The 'squaw' probably has hidden it in a safe place. Is thet what you-all did, Squaw?"

"Ho!"

"What air the Indians saying about us?" persisted the guide.

"Squaw woman say Big Medicine heap medicine man. Make um moo—oo spit up sickness when could not." The Indian gazed into Lieutenant Wingate's face, an expression of awe in his eyes.

"He means that you are the champion cow

doctor of the Hills," interpreted Emma, to the great amusement of the girls and the utter confusion of Hippy.

"If he does I must say he has a most unpleasant way of telling it," objected Miss Briggs.

"Red, I want you to do something for me. I want a tepee cloth to use for myself. Can you get one for me?" asked Lieutenant Wingate.

"Me steal um!" promptly answered the Indian.

"No, no!" objected Nora. "You mustn't do that. We wish to buy one, and will pay for it if you get a good one."

"Me steal um," insisted the "squaw."

"Remember! No steal. I buy!" reminded Hippy.

"Me buy." Red Wolf suddenly lifted his head and listened intently. The others heard nothing more than the ordinary noises of the Indian encampment, but the Wolf had caught a sound that stirred him. He sprang to his feet and slunk away without uttering a sound.

The Overlanders were puzzled to know what the Indian had heard that served to drive him away, but even San Antone could not answer the question. The guide then piloted Grace and Tom to Mr. Comstock's residence, where, after they had spent a pleasant and instructive evening, San Antone waited to lead them back to

camp. The guide was very much on the alert during all the rest of the night, though nothing occurred to disturb the Overland camp. Keen eyes, however, were watching in the shadows of the grove all unsuspected by the sleeping Overland Riders or their guide.

At an early hour next morning the party were awakened by a great chattering and grunting just outside of their tents. Not knowing what to make of it, but being certain that the racket had to do with them, they dressed hurriedly and went out. A most unusual sight was met with. Fully twenty squaws and several bucks were assembled in front of Lieutenant Wingate's tent, San Antone observing them narrowly. The squaws began jabbering the instant they set eyes on Hippy.

"What's this?" demanded Hippy. "Has this camp turned into a stock farm?"

The squaws were leading cows, pigs and calves, and here and there a pony. One was dragging a skinny goose by a string tied to its neck.

"They have come to see the cow doctor," volunteered Emma, quickly comprehending the meaning of the scene.

"Thet's right, Miss Dean," spoke up San Antone. "Lieutenant, they say they've heard thet you air a big medicine man who makes sick cows well by the touch of your magic hand."

"His magic hand! Ha, ha! Somebody hold me before I explode. Ha, ha; haw, haw!" howled Chunky.

"Haw, haw!" mimicked Emma. "Perhaps Doctor Wingate may have something that is good for your species, too."

"It would be good for us if you-all can do somethin' fer 'em," suggested the guide. The Overland Riders were convulsed with laughter over the new rôle that Hippy had been called upon to play. They were delighted, and Hippy well knew that he must expect a severe teasing all the rest of the summer. This thought decided him.

"All right, Tex. Tell them to bring on the live stock," he directed.

The guide beckoned to the woman with the sick goose, and Hippy looked the bird over wisely. He observed that it kept opening its mouth, its bill held high. This gave him an idea, and Hippy looked into the bird's mouth, then called to Nora to fetch the small pliers from his kit.

"This is easy," chuckled Lieutenant Wingate. When the pliers were in hand, San Antone was directed to hold the bird's mouth open, and amid a great squawking and struggling he inserted the pliers, gave a quick pull and brought out a piece of cartridge shell. The goose, no doubt lured by its brightness, had tried to swallow it.

“Happy day! Oh, happy day — for geese,” murmured Emma as Hippy carelessly handed the goose to the woman, directing her to take the bird home and give it some soft mash to eat.

A sick cow was then led up to the Big Medicine Man. Hippy rolled up his sleeves. He was getting rather warm. The cow needed medicine, so he gave her a big dose of horse remedy. The cure was not as speedy as in the case of the goose, but on the following day Hippy had the satisfaction of learning that the cow was eating normally and evincing a real interest in life. A pony, he discovered, had driven a nail deep into its hoof. He extracted it skillfully.

And so it went on for more than an hour until all the “patients” had been disposed of and the squaws had gone away happy, the bucks with many grunts, but whether of approval or disapproval the Overland Riders did not know, but Hippy’s reputation as a big medicine man was established on that reservation for all time.

During the night a city of tepees had sprung up, extending far out towards the limits of the Agency. Indians had come in during the night and had silently pitched their tepees.

“Buffalo Face is here!” announced San Antone after an early morning stroll among the villages.

"Where?" questioned Emma, to whom his remark had been directed.

The guide pointed to a tepee, its peak decorated with a feather, an arrow painted on its side.

"Thet's whar he lives, an' his gang is campin' right 'bout him. Thar's the old critter's daughter now. Moon Face, they call her."

"What a funny name," bubbled Nora. "She is coming this way, too."

"Jest wanderin' 'round out of curiosity," said the guide.

Moon Face halted before the Overland camp, her slowly roving eyes taking in every detail of the pale-face abodes. Then Moon Face, attracted by a splashing noise behind Stacy Brown's tepee, where he had gone with a pail of water to bathe his feet after the mosquitoes had made them their playground through the night, peered around the tent. The instant she caught sight of the fat boy her eyes lighted with interest, and grew large and wondering.

"Now look out for squalls. Oh, girls! Wait till Stacy discovers her," chuckled Grace.

"Heap fine boy!" crooned the Indian girl, whereupon Stacy for the first time became aware of her presence. He started up, his face red and disturbed.

"Get out of here!" he ordered, waving his

arms. "I don't like to have girls around when I'm attending to my family affairs."

Moon Face sat down and gazed soulfully at the disturbed Chunky.

"How you make so white — so big like bear?" she wondered.

"None of your business! Will you get out of here?" yelled the fat boy furiously.

"Stacy! Stacy!" remonstrated Emma. "Don't forget that you should always be polite to a lady."

"I say, drive her away or I'm afraid I'll be rude. Can't a fellow be left alone for a minute?"

The boy began making threatening motions with his hands as if he were about to throw something at the girl, but she remained undisturbed, plainly determined to hold her position as long as she pleased.

Stacy was furious. Scooping up a handful of water from the pail he hurled it at the Indian girl. She laughed merrily and retaliated by flinging a handful of dirt over the fat boy.

"Drive her away. I'll throw the pail of water on her if you folks don't do something!" he threatened. Cautiously removing his feet from the pail, and holding it between himself and Moon Face, he began stepping to one side with the intention of making a dive for his tent. Moon Face sidled along also. There was no

getting rid of her. Stacy uttered a wild yell, hoping to frighten her away, whereupon several braves lounged that way. They, too, became interested as the girl chattered something in her own tongue, and grunted their disapproval of him. One brave laughed, pointing a jeering finger at the red-faced fat boy.

"You will make fun of me, will you?" raged Stacy, suddenly lifting the pail of water and hurling its contents full into the faces of the Indian bucks. Then, with a wild whoop, he dashed into his tent.

"Sta—a—acy!" cried the Overlanders.

The Indians staggered back, at first in amazement at the boy's boldness, then, angered at the insult he had offered them, they started for the Overland boy's tent, plainly with the intention of hauling him out. But the Indians halted, as they found themselves suddenly facing San Antone's angry face.

"What do ye reckon ye want?" he drawled. "Get out of this heah right smart or I'll make ye dance!" threatened the guide.

Instead of halting, the Indians, muttering threats, made a rush for the fat boy's tent. The hand of one in the lead had grasped the flap when San Antone got into action. Tony's hand went to his hip with that lightning-like movement that was so much a part of him. But quick as he was,

Lieutenant Wingate had been quicker, and by the time the guide's revolver was out, Hippy was between him and the Indian.

Fastening a grip in the buck's hair, Hippy flung the fellow to the ground.

"Get out of here! You're lucky that you aren't dead already," warned the Overlander.

The Indian was on his feet with a bound.

"Look out for his knife!" cried Emma shrilly, as the Indian bounded towards the Overland Rider, bent on murder.

CHAPTER XVI

AROUND THE COUNCIL FIRE

SAN ANTONE shot from the hip, the muzzle of his revolver pointed downwards, because of the danger that he knew would result to others from shooting higher.

The shot was fired with deliberation, and reached the mark for which it was intended — the foot of the angry buck who was charging on Lieutenant Wingate with upraised knife. The Indian dropped, but was up again and limping away almost before the spectators realized what had occurred.

“Now you *have* done it, Tony!” rebuked Emma.

“Thank you,” added Hippy. “I reckon I’d had to do it if you hadn’t.”

A great uproar followed, but San Antone stood calmly waiting for whatever else might develop.

“Do ye houn’s reckon as ye want some more?” he drawled. “If ye don’t, get out!”

The bucks backed away sullenly, threatening the outfit with their eyes. In the meantime

someone had run for the Acting Agent, who, having heard the shot, already was on his way to the scene.

It took but a moment to acquaint Mr. Comstock with the facts, whereupon he went in search of the bucks who had been concerned in the attack, and promptly ordered them to return to their reservation in the Hills and stay there. He had no criticism to offer on the action of San Antone, but later urged Lieutenant Wingate to advise his party to be very careful that they did not further stir up the Indians, as trouble might result.

"Of course," added Mr. Comstock, "you are fully within your rights in protecting yourselves."

"Young man! Hereafter I would advise you to keep your feet out of sight," advised Tom, sternly regarding the fat boy.

"Keep that moon-faced girl away from here! I guess I have some rights around my own tent," grumbled Stacy.

"I reckon those cayuses never will ferget thet you throwed water on 'em," reminded the guide. "The braves air goin' to hold a council this evenin'. They've put up the council lodge already. The Agent says he's a little concerned 'bout it."

"Is it because of the shooting?" asked Grace.

"No. They asked permission before thet."

The Overlanders asked if they might attend the council of the braves.

"Thet's what I was goin' to tell ye when that feller tried to get into a mix-up. Comstock says ye may if you'll keep quiet an' not interfere with the proceedin's. The Indians air restless. I seen thet from the first. They air goin' to ask the Agent fer somethin' an', if they don't get it, then look out fer squalls. Mebby we'll see some real fun before we leave these heah parts," finished the guide.

"Mr. Comstock says that we have done him a great service — to be more exact, that Hippy has, in curing the sick stock for the squaws. It has made many of the Indians feel friendly towards us, though I am afraid we have spoiled all the good we have done," announced Tom.

"You'll hev to leave yer guns outside, folks," reminded the guide. "No weapons air ever taken into a council. Don't ferget thet."

"How about yourself, Tony?" teased Emma.

"Wal, I reckon I'll stay outside. Without my guns on I'd catch cold in 'bout a minute," answered the guide in his characteristic drawl.

No further disturbances marred the activities of the Overlanders that day, a day spent in observing the unusual scenes that furnished a colorful picture, an ever-changing picture, until dinner time. The Acting Agent sent word to

them to be at his office at eight o'clock that evening, so plans were made for doing so, San Antone offering to remain at home to see that nothing was stolen from their camp.

Shortly after eight o'clock the Overlanders proceeded to the Agency building where they found Mr. Comstock smoking his pipe, waiting for the hour when the council was to convene. He regarded his visitors with twinkling eyes as he shook hands with them.

"No more trouble, I hope, eh?" he questioned.

"Our principal trouble-maker has been very much chastened since the chief's daughter called on him," announced Emma.

"I must ask you all to keep perfectly quiet during the proceedings this evening, making no remarks, nor talking out loud among yourselves, for the Indians are touchy. I am quite certain that you will be discreet, but it is well to be forewarned," said Mr. Comstock.

"You may depend upon us," answered Miss Briggs.

"We will start now, as it will take some little time for the bucks to get settled and think over what they wish to say."

The party walked slowly across the grounds to the north of the Agency building, eventually arriving at a huge tepee, around which great numbers of braves and squaws had congregated.

Smoke was curling from the smoke-holes near the peak of the big tepee and braves, blanketed and hooded, were passing to and fro silent and expressionless. The scene already had become impressive.

Mr. Comstock, beckoning to his guests to follow him, stepped into the tepee and walked to the far end where he motioned to his party to be seated.

"This must be a medicine lodge," observed Stacy. "It smells like a hospital I was in once."

Stacy was right. The council tepee was the medicine lodge, and in it were gathered many stolid-faced braves. The odors from their pipes, and from the dried skins on which they were squatting, was almost overpowering. Had it not been for the smoke-holes, which carried off some of the odors, the party of Overlanders would have been in even greater distress than they were.

No word was spoken. The Indians were silent and none appeared to give the slightest heed to Mr. Comstock and his friends, the eyes of every brave in the tepee being fixed on the flickering council fire in the center. Other braves came in and took their places without so much as a glance at those already there.

"Buffalo Face is sitting down," announced Mr. Comstock. "That is he with the feather stuck in his hair."

The Overlanders eyed the chief inquiringly. Buffalo Face was fully six feet in his moccasins — straight, supple, muscular. They could see by the way he sat down that he had that perfect command of every muscle that marks the athlete. It was Buffalo's features, however, that especially attracted the attention of the guests. There were hard and cruel lines there, and the eyes were shifty, having a habit of glancing up quickly from under half-closed eyelids and taking in their surroundings in one flashing look. The Overlanders were favored with one of those comprehending glances as the chief sat down, but no displeasure was observable in the stolid countenance.

Following the chief, a bent, slouching figure entered, a string of bears' teeth rattling at his waist. The newcomer made the sign of peace, and gazing over the heads of the assemblage kept his eyes on the sombre walls of the tepee.

"Who is that?" whispered Miss Briggs.

"The war priest," answered Mr. Comstock.

"He always conducts these councils."

"I should like to have that string of beads he is carrying," said Stacy out loud.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Grace.

"But he needs a pair of shoulder braces to straighten him up," added the fat boy in the same tone.

Grace pinched his arm, whereupon the fat boy grunted "Ouch!"

The braves gave no heed to the interruption, but perhaps they did not hear it. Mr. Comstock did not smile. His eyes were raised, his gaze fixed on the smoke-flaps above his head.

"Good gracious! Look who's here!" exclaimed Nora in an excited whisper.

"The Man in Black — Professor Black!" wondered Elfreda.

Professor Black, clad as they had seen him when he visited the Overland camp, sat down and deposited his bag of "specimens" at his side, removed his lidless straw hat, curled his legs underneath him in Indian fashion, and gazed solemnly into the council fire.

Mr. Comstock gave the professor a quick, keen glance, then resumed his study of the roof of the tepee. The Overlanders wondered, but Stacy, in a voice audible all over the tepee, answered their unspoken question.

"I reckon Old Mystery is here looking for the Do-Do thing," he observed.

"If you speak out loud again I'll have you put out," threatened Tom Gray.

At this juncture the voice of a squaw outside the tepee was raised in a weird chant, and thereupon the war priest deliberately drew a long pipe from beneath his blanket and filled it slowly.

"*La gome towah!*" he grunted, meaning that he wanted a torch.

One was deftly snatched from the fire, and with it he lighted the pipe, took several deliberate puffs and handed it to a brave to be passed to Mr. Comstock. The Acting Agent gravely went through the motions of taking a few puffs, then passed the pipe back.

"Whew! That's awful," muttered Stacy, getting a brief whiff of the pipe as it passed him. "They must smoke kinnikinnick or dried leaves in that thing."

"It is the pipe of peace," Mr. Comstock informed him.

"Pipe of peace! Pshaw! One puff at that would make a man willing to fight an Ippy Do-Do single-handed."

Mr. Comstock's face expanded in a grin, but still none of the braves heeded the interruption.

The pipe of peace was twice passed about the circle of braves, the chant of the squaw having been the signal for the beginning of the pow-wow. The council was now in session. There must be no interruption. Now that the formalities had begun, no braves must enter or leave the tepee — formalities that were destined to result in a greater sensation than, in the memory of any Indian there, had ever occurred at a council meeting.

CHAPTER XVII

HIPPI RESENTS AN INSULT

THE war priest laid the pipe aside, after having knocked the ashes from the bowl into the council fire.

“Chetwoot!” he fairly exploded, without looking up.

“He is calling for the chief known as Chetwoot, meaning the bear,” Mr. Comstock informed the Overlanders in a low tone.

“How!” said Chetwoot, turning his face to Mr. Comstock, and at the same time making the sign of peace.

“How!” answered the Acting Agent. “You would speak.”

Chetwoot rose slowly to his full height. His was a commanding figure, tall and supple as that of Buffalo Face himself.

“My friend, we would have speech with you. Those things have come to our ears which make the heart of the red man sad,” he said, speaking in English, in which, for the benefit of the Agent, the proceedings of the council were conducted,

except as here and there an Indian exclamation was uttered. "It has come to the tribes of the Hills that the white man would graze his cattle and his sheep on our hunting grounds. Do I not speak truly?"

"Proceed! Say your say," urged the Acting Agent.

"Already the cattle are following the long trail from the Bad Lands. Even now they are making short the grass in the foothills of the Hills. Even now our braves are driving their ponies far into the gulches that they may have that which keeps the spirit within. For what reason has the white man entered the reservation of the Sioux?" Chetwoot's voice was eloquent. His eloquence, his intelligence and his command of language led the Overlanders to give him almost breathless attention.

"They have not done so, Chetwoot," replied Mr. Comstock gravely.

"Not so?"

"No."

"Then why these things?"

"The White Father at Washington has granted permission to certain cattle raisers to graze their stock in the Hills for a short time because there have been no rains in the lowlands, and the sun has burned their grass away. They are here but for a brief stay."

"Why do they not remain in the Bad Lands?" persisted the chief.

"I have told you. Their stock is starving."

"Our ponies and our own cattle, too, will starve. The cattle and the sheep from the Bad Lands soon will eat up all the food from our reservation. The red man likes it not. What does the white brother say we shall do?"

"Go in peace! The White Father can do nothing wrong. He has the interests of the red man at heart," Mr. Comstock made prompt reply.

"What of my brothers who have tilled the soil? What of their crops?" demanded Chetwoot.

"They shall not be disturbed."

"Are not these Hills the red man's own?" demanded Chetwoot.

"You know that such is not the case, Chetwoot. The lands are for the use of the Indian, not the Indian's own to do with as he pleases, save in particular cases of which I need not speak."

"Then you will not stop those who come with their cattle, their sheep, their dogs and their squaws?" questioned the chief.

"I have not the power to do so, Chetwoot, but the Agent is now in Washington to discuss this very thing with the Government. You will

do well to abide by such word as he may bring back to you. Have I your word that you will do as I suggest, Chetwoot? ”

“ We shall do nothing until the cowmen and their stock come into our lands in the Hills. Beyond that I cannot say. Who are these? ” he demanded, fixing a piercing gaze on the Overland Riders.

“ Friends of mine, ” replied Mr. Comstock. “ They would attend the council. ”

“ They shall go! They shall not remain. There be bad spirits in their eyes. ”

“ Whisper to Stacy and ask him to leave the room, ” urged Emma in Elfreda’s ear.

“ They shall remain, Chief. I assure you they mean no harm, ” replied Mr. Comstock.

“ I know them not. They shall go. Begone! ”

“ Big Medicine him stay! ” cried a voice that seemed to come up from the ground.

The Overlanders saw the face of an Indian thrust under the wall of the tepee.

“ It’s ‘ Sawbucks ’! ” cried Chunky.

“ Woo! ” grunted the braves, thrusting with their hands as if to push the head of Red Wolf from underneath the tepee wall, but Red Wolf already had withdrawn his head.

“ I would speak with the voice of the White Father, ” announced Buffalo Face, referring to Mr. Comstock, at the same time uncoiling himself and

rising to his height. "These that Chetwoot would have begone, I also would have begone. They be *wake kloshe!*"

"No good," interpreted Mr. Comstock.

"How so, Chief?" demanded the Acting Agent.

"The white men did visit one of my peaceful camps in the Hills, and there attack my braves, beat my chief, and spirit from my village a squaw-buck. To-day one did shoot and make lame another of my braves here where the White Father says there shall be peace. They must go—leave the Hills! They shall no longer hunt in them, for the Hills belong to us. The white bucks and their squaws shall leave. I have said it!"

"Buffalo! I warn you not to interfere with these friends. If you do it will be at your peril," warned Mr. Comstock. "They have proved themselves the friends of your people this day. They have permission to be here, and they may shoot such game as they desire, so long as they violate no law. Did not the Big Medicine Man save the cow for the squaw? Did he not by his skill cause the animal to throw out the potato that had stuck in her windpipe?"

"Is it he who put life into the goose when there was little life there?" questioned Chetwoot.

"The very same," answered Mr. Comstock. Then turning to Buffalo the Acting Agent continued: "Do you still say that they must go?"

"Yes! All shall go," commanded Buffalo Face.

Chetwoot regarded the Overland Riders with burning eyes, one by one, his gaze finally resting on the face of Lieutenant Wingate. Hippy gave back the look in a respectful but fearless gaze.

"The Big Medicine is much brave buck," declared Chetwoot. "He shall stay! All shall stay, if —"

"Then let them return the rifle of Buffalo Face that they have spirited away with their black magic!" thundered Buffalo.

"What is this you say?" demanded Mr. Comstock.

"We haven't his rifle, sir," spoke up Lieutenant Wingate, addressing the Acting Agent.

"Does the white medicine man deny that he knows of it?" demanded Buffalo.

Hippy was silent, and the Indians were quick to catch the significance of that silence.

"*Nika wake tsolo!*" roared Buffalo Face, lapsing into his own tongue.

"What is he saying?" whispered Tom Gray.

"He says, 'We no longer wander in the dark,' meaning that they understand. Lieutenant Wingate's failure to answer Buffalo's question has convinced the Indians that he was concerned in the theft of the rifle."

Hippy was on his feet in an instant, his face

flushed with anger, but when he spoke his voice was under perfect control.

"Chief Buffalo," he said, "we have not possessed your rifle, nor do we know where it is."

"The white man lies! "

"Peace! " cried Chetwoot.

"I bet you don't dare go outside and tell him that! " shouted Chunky.

Hippy Wingate did not hear. He was making a tremendous effort to control himself, and the Overlanders seeing, understood and made no sign, except as Miss Briggs put a firm grip on Stacy Brown's wrist to warn him to keep silent.

Hippy walked slowly towards the angry chief. Buffalo's shoulders were hunched forward, his knees bent slightly, like a wild beast ready to spring upon its prey. All this Lieutenant Wingate watchfully noted.

"Chief, I have spoken," he said. "We know not where your rifle is. We may have seen it — I am not saying that we have not, but with its taking we have had nothing to do. Look among your own people if you would recover your weapon. Seek and you shall find."

It required no great powers of observation to discover what was coming next, for it was plainly written in the face of the enraged Buffalo Face. Mr. Comstock saw it, and Mr. Comstock understood.

"Peace!" he shouted. "Buffalo, you have smoked the pipe; you have sealed your word!"

Buffalo heeded neither admonition. He made a sudden leap towards the Overland Rider, a longer leap than Hippy had calculated on the chief's being able to do, but, being on his guard, Lieutenant Wingate sprang backward, then took a forward leap. At the same time one hand shot out and in a flash the chief's prominent nose was gripped between Hippy Wingate's fingers. He gave the nose a terrific tweak and sprang back to safety.

Though this tweak must have given the Indian severe pain he did not even utter a grunt.

"The pale face lies! He is a liar and thief!" screamed Buffalo, now having wholly lost all control of himself.

It had all occurred so quickly that the white guests had had no opportunity to collect their thoughts. They sat staring, for Lieutenant Wingate's daring held them motionless.

"Liar!" Chief Buffalo Face again hurled himself at the Overland Rider, both arms flung wide to embrace the white man.

Hippy at the same instant threw his body forward. His right fist shot up in a short-arm jolt that had his weight and momentum behind it.

The spectators barely saw the blow delivered, but they plainly heard the impact when Hippy's

hard fist smashed against the protruding belligerent chin of Buffalo Face.

This time Buffalo grunted so that all heard. For a second the chief swayed unsteadily, then plunged sideways to the ground, and there he lay motionless with head close to the council fire.

CHAPTER XVIII

“BIG MEDICINE! BIG WARRIOR!”

A SHRILL piercing yell was uttered by the fat boy. Hippy had stepped back, the color leaving his face as quickly as it had come.

“I had to do it,” he muttered, narrowly watching his fallen adversary.

“Of course you did,” persisted Stacy gleefully.

Mr. Comstock and Tom Gray had sprung forward at the same instant. What they feared was that the braves might fall upon the visitors, and, perhaps in their anger, do the Overland Riders serious injury. But the braves did nothing of the sort. Whether they thought Buffalo Face had gotten what he deserved, or whether they were indifferent because he had fallen in a personal cause, the Overlanders never knew. The Indians sat stolidly gazing into the fire, glancing neither at their chief nor at his victorious adversary.

“Hippy has started more trouble for us,” complained Elfreda.

“I think so,” agreed Grace.

Chetwoot, at this instant, made the sign of peace to Hippy.

"Big Medicine! Big Warrior! Much big little man," he grunted.

"Oh, we're all big little men," answered Stacy. "I shouldn't mind trimming a few copper kettles myself."

"Will you please stop?" begged Elfreda in exasperation. "Quite enough has been done already."

Hippy was now apologizing to Mr. Comstock.

"You did as I should have tried to do in the circumstances. You resented an insult, and you struck in self-defense," said the Acting Agent. "I of course regret that this has happened, but can in no wise blame you. The blame, if any, is on my own shoulders for having permitted you to risk entering the council at a time when the Indians are so restless. I have never seen them so touchy since I have been on the reservation."

Lieutenant Wingate stepped over, and, raising the head of his victim, who was stirring slightly, called for water. When the water was brought to him the Overlander dashed it into the face of the unconscious chief. This was an added humiliation, though Hippy was unaware of the fact. He had thought to help his enemy, but, instead, he was heaping insult on the red man's head.

Buffalo recovered consciousness quickly. Then

sputtering and twisting his head from side to side, he crawled over to his place in the circle and sat down, making neither sign nor sound. At last he permitted his gaze to wander about the enclosure until his eyes finally rested on the face of his conqueror.

Buffalo's right hand stole cautiously towards his belt. Then with unexpected suddenness the chief leaped to his feet, and the Overlanders saw something flash in his hand.

"*Opitsah! Opitsah!*" screamed the voice of Red Wolf from beneath the tepee wall, meaning, "A knife! A knife!"

Chetwoot brought his own right arm up with a lightning-like swing. It struck Buffalo's arm, and the knife was knocked from the chief's hand and sent hurtling to the top of the medicine lodge. The knife-point penetrated the canvas, then fell to the ground. Chetwoot forced Buffalo back to his place, and made the sign of peace with crossed hands over his breast.

"My brother has broken the pledge of the pipe!" announced Chetwoot sadly. "What shall the punishment be?" he asked, turning to the Acting Agent.

"He shall remain," directed Mr. Comstock. "Buffalo Face was in anger when he attacked my friend, but whether with or without reason I do not now say. Further disturbance, however, will

force me to arrest the offender and turn him over to the soldiers at the fort. Proceed! What would you that I should do?"

"*Hyas till Nika* ("I am very tired"), answered Chetwoot. "My brother has broken the peace of the pipe. I say no more. I await the decision of the White Father. If it be so that the Indian's lands shall be occupied by the cows of the white men from the Bad Lands, then so let it be."

"Chetwoot is sad," soothed Mr. Comstock. "Be of good cheer, for the President will do that which is right; then Chetwoot no longer shall be sad. These friends of mine shall hunt, but they shall not destroy the Indians' game — they shall shoot only so much as they need for food on their journey."

"We shall shoot no game at all," spoke up Hippy. "I now see clearly that it is not right that we do so."

Chetwoot bowed low and with great dignity.

"Medicine Man is great — greater than his red brother of the Hills," murmured Chetwoot.

"Buffalo!" resumed Mr. Comstock. "I charge you to go your way in peace. To-morrow you dance. In the meantime I will make inquiries about your rifle. Lieutenant Wingate has said that you should look among your own people for the lost weapon. I am of the opinion that you will do well to heed his words. If there is no

more to be said we will smoke the pipe and return to our own tepees."

Chetwoot bowed again, but Buffalo Face sat stolidly regarding the council fire. The pipe was lighted by the war priest and passed around the circle twice as before, but each time, it was observed by the Acting Agent, Buffalo Face merely brushed his lips with the pipe, taking no puff at all. The ashes were then shaken into the council fire and the fire itself stamped out, after which the braves filed out, Mr. Comstock and his friends leaving the tepee last of all. The Man in Black, as the party of guests recalled later, had disappeared without their having seen him go.

The Overlanders, on reaching the fresh air, breathed sighs of relief. Mr. Comstock accompanied them to their camp, and arriving there sat down to discuss the events of the evening.

Tom Gray said he was deeply humiliated that they had been the cause of any disturbance.

"Lieutenant Wingate had no choice in the matter, I should say," answered the Acting Agent. "Buffalo Face was so enraged that he probably would have killed the lieutenant. The chief has weakened himself with his people by attending a council in a medicine lodge with a weapon on his person, and he may suffer for that. Do you mind telling me what you know about the theft of the rifle — do you know anything about it at all?"

"We think we do," spoke up Grace.

"I wish you would tell me what you do know," urged Mr. Comstock.

"It doesn't seem right for us to do that," replied Hippy. "The information came to us through one who had done us a great service — an Indian whom we had once befriended. One day he brought a rifle with him to our camp, a rifle which he said he had taken from Buffalo's camp. We advised him to return it."

"Is he here?"

"Yes, but I have not seen him have the weapon here. That is all I care to say about it, sir, if you will excuse me."

"Say no more. I know the fellow now, and I don't blame him. However, I fear that a rifle in his hands may cause trouble, and while the tribes are here for the Omaha I shall have him watched closely. I suppose, after what happened this evening, that you people will not care to go to the dance to-morrow night?" questioned the Acting Agent with a smile.

"Of course we do," bubbled Emma. "We Overlanders simply could not resist an invitation to a dance. Of course we shall go."

Mr. Comstock laughed heartily.

"You are a plucky lot," he said. "There are no tenderfeet in your outfit."

"With one exception, sir," answered Emma.

"That one's feet are extremely sensitive to certain changes of temperature."

Elfreda asked if there would be danger of further trouble with Buffalo Face.

"I hardly think he will dare go to extremes here, but I should not advise you to stir him further. He has the most ungovernable temper of all the Indians I ever knew, and I have been among them for more than twenty years."

"Is their complaint justified?" asked Miss Briggs.

"Chetwoot spoke truly. However, the Indians are unnecessarily alarmed. They think this is the beginning of a movement to take away their hunting grounds; but such is not the intention. The situation is as I told them."

"May I ask a favor, sir?" interrupted Chunky.

"You may," answered the Acting Agent, smiling indulgently, for Stacy amused him immensely.

"Please lock up that squaw until I get off the reservation."

Mr. Comstock looked puzzled.

"I mean that Moon Face person who hung around my tent while I was attending to my family affairs. She'll be around here again in the morning if you don't lock her up, and if she does come I'll forget myself and drive her away with a switch," threatened the fat boy.

Mr. Comstock laughed heartily.

"Should she bother you further, come right to me. You must be protected, young man, even if we have to call out the soldiers from the fort to do it," offered Mr. Comstock, rising to take his departure.

San Antone was furious when informed of what had occurred at the council that night, and threatened to call Buffalo Face to account for his attack on Lieutenant Wingate.

"Tony! We have learned one thing this night. You aren't the only savage in the Overland outfit; but just the same I am thankful that you had the good sense to stay at home," declared Emma.

The guide made them tell the story all over again, listening with frowning brow. His interest quickened when Elfreda told him of the presence of the Man in Black at the Indian council meeting. San Antone, too, had some information for the Overlanders. He informed them that two strange white men had been in the grove that night in conference with an Indian.

"I tried to get close enough to 'em to find out what they war up to, but the critters got away in a hurry when they seen me. Thar was somethin' familiar 'bout one of the whites, but I couldn't say whar I'd seen him. I reckon thar's somethin' more comin' off heah."

"We should worry. I'm going to bed," an-



He Saw a Figure Rise and Leap from the Tent.

nounced Stacy. "Should any of you folks see the moon-faced lady hovering about my tent in the morning, shoo her off."

The Overlanders decided that they, too, would turn in, and shortly after that they were asleep, and the fire that San Antone had kept up during their absence was dying out. No one remained awake to guard the camp, as it was not believed that it would be disturbed, now that the Indians understood that the Overlanders were friends of the Acting Agent, for Mr. Comstock had a stern way of putting down any interference with those in whom he was interested.

It was long past midnight when the darkness was most intense, the campfires in the Indian villages having long since died out, that a wriggling object approached the Overland camp, creeping, crawling, halting, now and again lying prone on the ground to listen and observe, then moving forward again.

The wriggling object was an Indian. He held a knife between his teeth and was heading directly for the tent occupied by Lieutenant Hippy Wingate. The Indian was soon so close to the tent that Hippy's snores must have been plainly audible to him; and there he paused listening for several minutes. The Indian's next forward movement placed his head and shoulders inside the open tent-flap.

A second figure at this juncture slowly raised itself from the ground just behind the creeping Indian, poised in a crouching attitude, then leaped upon the intruder.

The thud when this second figure landed on the crawling Indian, and the grunt uttered by that redskin, awakened the sleeping Overlander.

“Wha—at —”

A screech of pain, a sudden commotion, brought not only Hippy to his feet, but every other member of the Overland party. He saw a figure rise and leap from the tent. Hippy sprang after him and stumbling, fell over the body of the Indian who had come there to attack him.

“Help here!” shouted Lieutenant Wingate, springing to his feet and leaping out into the open just as San Antone and Tom Gray, followed by the rest of the party, came running to his tent.

CHAPTER XIX

THE THRUST THAT FAILED

“**A** LIGHT here, quick!” shouted Hippy.
“There’s a man in my tent and he may be dead!”

Grace, before leaving her tent, had had the forethought to bring her pocket lamp. Hippy took it from her and stepped back into his tent followed by Tom and the guide, the others of the party hesitating at the entrance.

“It’s a redskin!” announced the guide. “He’s been knifed — thar in the shoulder.”

“Is he dead?” begged Grace in an awed tone.

“No!” cried Tom. “Get help! Someone go for the Agent and a doctor.”

“The Indians are coming!” yelled Stacy, starting for his tent.

“Come back here!” commanded Hippy. “We must keep together.”

“Let me look the man over,” requested Elfreda in a firm voice. “Yes, the fellow is alive, but he will die unless we can stop the bleeding at once. My kit, quick!”

It was fetched by Tom. Indians could be heard, running towards the Overland camp, chattering and shouting, for the word had been mysteriously passed that one of their people had been killed. It looked as if they were going to rush the Overland camp, but they were brought to an abrupt stop by San Antone.

"Whar do ye reckon yer goin'?" he demanded, facing them with a revolver in either hand. "Get a doctor. 'Thar's an Indian in thar thet somebody stuck a knife into, an' I reckon it's a good job so fer as it went. Get a doctor an' get the Agent before I let go at ye!" commanded the guide.

An angry, menacing murmur greeted the words, but two braves suddenly broke from the rapidly increasing mob and ran to do the Texan's bidding.

In the meantime Elfreda had obtained her kit and was doing her best, assisted by Grace, to stop the flow of blood from the Indian's shoulder wound, while San Antone, with those ever-ready revolvers, kept the now thoroughly aroused Indians at a safe distance from the scene.

It was but a few moments later when Mr. Comstock and the Agency surgeon came running up, followed in bounding leaps by Chief Buffalo Face, Chetwoot and several braves. Miss Briggs and Grace were still working over the wounded man, and after a hurried examination the surgeon said

the man would live, adding further that the emergency treatment of the two Overland girls undoubtedly had saved the man's life.

Up to this time, Buffalo Face had kept some distance from the tent. He now strode forward, his face contorted with passion.

"You see!" he roared, pointing to Hippy, but addressing his remarks to the Acting Agent. "The White Medicine is bad medicine. You see what he do. He try kill my brave. He must go—go now! My braves I cannot hold. They mad, much mad."

"Be quiet, Buffalo Face! You are excited. I promise you that this affair shall be investigated," promised Mr. Comstock.

"Him try kill brave!"

"What's thet you-all say?" drawled San Antone. "You poor miserable old scoundrel! Do you mean to say thet this gentleman tried to kill thet fellow?"

"Yes. Buffalo Face says it!"

The guide strolled up to the chief and, quick as a flash, thrust the muzzle of a revolver against the chief's stomach.

"I'm kind of hard a-hearin', Chief. Who is it you-all says did this heah little job?" questioned San Antone sweetly.

The Indian's body did not flinch, but his eyes did ever so little.

"Mebby not know," grunted Buffalo Face.

"I reckoned as you-all didn't," drawled San Antone, retiring to his former position.

"Please, Tony, don't do anything foolish," urged Emma.

Indians now bore the wounded man away, followed by the surgeon, and as soon as this had been done, Mr. Comstock asked the Overlanders to give him what information they had on the occurrence.

"Buffalo Face and Chetwoot! Come forward. I wish you to hear all that these guests of ours have to say," directed Mr. Comstock.

"You keep out of this or I'll wallop you right!" threatened Hippy in the guide's ear.

"Proceed, Lieutenant Wingate. I believe it was in your tent that the brave was wounded."

"The little that I know is quickly told," answered Hippy. "I was sleeping when a sound in my tent awakened me. It must have been that Indian creeping in, for he was on the ground. At that moment someone behind him leaped on the fellow; then followed a screech that brought me to my feet. I saw a second person leap up and run away. That is the whole story, sir."

"Was the second man an Indian or a white man?" asked the Acting Agent.

"I don't know. It was too dark to see well, and I hadn't got all the sleep out of my eyes."

"No one but yourself saw either man, did he?" asked Mr. Comstock.

"None of our party did. I do not know whether other persons did or not."

"Have you a knife, Lieutenant?"

"Of course. Two of them. A pocket knife in my trousers, and my hunting knife in its sheath in my tent. Do you wish to see them?"

"I think it might be well to do so."

Both knives were produced, and first examined by Mr. Comstock, then gravely by the two Indian chiefs, who passed the knives back without comment.

"Buffalo, are you satisfied?" questioned the Acting Agent.

"Not satisfied," grunted the chief.

"You're a hard shell, aren't you?" interjected Stacy.

"What you do about this?" demanded Buffalo Face.

"I shall have our men try to find the guilty one. But, Chief, the wounded man is one of your bucks. Will you tell me what he was doing in Lieutenant Wingate's tent at that hour in the morning?"

"Not know."

"You don't know whether or not the Indian carried a weapon with him, do you, Mr. Wingate?"

Hippy said that he did not know.

"If he did it must be in the tent now. We will look, with your permission."

The two chiefs and the Acting Agent entered the tent, the Overlanders looking on from the outside. An exclamation from Mr. Comstock told them that he had made a discovery.

"Here is the knife, an Indian knife at that. Chief, to whom does this knife belong?" he demanded sternly, fixing his eyes on Buffalo Face.

"Not know," grunted the chief.

"You don't seem to know much of anything this evening, do you?" retorted Mr. Comstock with a note of irony in his voice.

"I say, Mr. Comstock!" It was the voice of San Antone. "I reckon I can make him talk if you-all will go 'way from heah for 'bout a minute."

"He knows to whom the knife belongs," whispered Elfreda, referring to Buffalo Face.

"Thank you, San Antone, but we can't have such methods, as you would use, practiced on the Indians. It won't do at all. I am glad we found this knife. I shall keep it and perhaps may be able to identify it. It is my belief that it belongs to the wounded buck, not to the man who stabbed him."

"Chief Buffalo see buck and ask him who cut with knife," volunteered Buffalo Face.

The Acting Agent ordered the chief to keep away from the wounded man, preferring to ask his own questions, which he said he would do as soon as the surgeon gave permission. He directed the chief to go back to his village, and warned him against stirring up his people.

"If you folks are not going to turn in at once I would suggest that you walk over to the hospital with me. The man ought to be able to talk by this time. Indians have fine recuperative powers," said the Acting Agent.

The Overland Riders eagerly accepted the invitation, leaving San Antone to nurse his rage alone and watch the camp, not a safe place now for Indian prowlers.

Mr. Comstock was with the wounded man for nearly half an hour before he returned to his guests. His face wore a serious expression when he joined them at his office, before which curious Indians had gathered in large numbers waiting for something "to turn up," as he expressed it.

"What luck? Is the man alive?" questioned Tom.

"Very much so. He will be out of the hospital before morning if the surgeon will let him. A queer thing happened there," added Mr. Comstock reflectively. "After the buck had told his story to me, by starts and jerks, and the usual

grunts, a voice — the voice of a white man — broke in.

“ ‘The Indian buck lies!’ said the voice. It was someone outside who said it, but, though I sprang to the window instantly, not a person was in sight. I know it was none of you people, but it bothers me not a little. One mystery a night is enough for this ordinarily quiet reservation.”

“Does he give any reason for being in my tent?” asked Hippy.

“Yes. He told me several things, things that make it advisable for me to keep him from seeing any of his fellows or his chief, at least until after the Omaha dance. The buck says that he was on his way to the spring where you get your water, when a man suddenly jumped on him from the rear and drove a knife into his shoulder. He says the knife was intended to pierce his heart, but that he turned so quickly that it entered his shoulder instead.”

“Hm-m-m!” muttered Hippy.

“He says that his captor, after stabbing him, dragged him over and threw him into a white man’s tent, and that as he did so the man who had attacked him uttered a wild yell, but the brave fainted then, according to his story, and knew no more for some time.”

“That Indian has real imagination,” cried Emma with some enthusiasm.

"Of course he didn't see who it was that attacked him, did he?" wondered Tom.

"He says he did; says that he turned as the knife entered his shoulder, as I just told you, and got a good look at his assailant. He declares that it was a white man, and that he knew the man."

"Who was it?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate eagerly.

"He says you are the man who drove the knife into his shoulder!" announced the Acting Agent.

CHAPTER XX

THE DANCE IN THE OMAHA HOUSE

THE Overland Riders uttered the one word, "Oh!"

"The man lies!" protested Tom Gray angrily.

"Yes, that is what I told him, and that is what the voice from the outside said also. Of course the idea is preposterous, and I do not wish you to think that I have given it the least consideration. However, it won't do to let Buffalo Face know what the buck said, nor would I suggest your repeating his statement to that sudden guide of yours. He might do something imprudent, you know," added Mr. Comstock smiling.

"I shall keep the wounded man from seeing anyone until after the dance, and probably for some days after you have left the reservation. He is one of Buffalo Face's scouts and stands close to the chief, and therein may lie the answer to the problem that is before me," concluded the Acting Agent enigmatically.

"Good-night! Don't lose any sleep over what

I have told you, for I am going to turn that buck over for trial for attempting to take your life, Lieutenant. I shall have plenty of evidence to warrant his punishment, and —”

“By the way, Mr. Comstock! Do you know a Professor Black?” questioned Miss Briggs.

“Black — Black?”

“He says he is a geologist. He was at the council for a short time — an odd-looking creature,” reminded Grace.

“Oh!” Mr. Comstock gave Elfreda a queer look. “I know who the man is,” he said. “Good-night once more!”

“Well? Did you find out what you wished to know?” laughed Grace, as they reached the open.

“Yes, I did,” replied Elfreda, but she failed to explain further.

The Overlanders went to bed soon after reaching camp, though there were only a few hours of sleep remaining to them. This time San Antone sat up to guard the camp, in view of the “unsettled conditions,” as Emma expressed it. Stacy went to bed grumbling at having had to lose a good part of his night’s sleep, and it seemed but a few moments later when Emma Dean’s voice awakened him, shortly after dawn.

“Stacy! Get up. Your friend is out here,” Emma informed him.

"My friend?"

"Yes. She with the cheeks that shine like the polished sides of a copper kettle. Moon Face, I believe she calls herself."

"Send her away! Send her away, I tell you!" shouted Chunky in sudden panic. "If you don't, somebody surely will get hurt." The fat boy sprang out of bed and hurriedly fastened his tent-flap with horse-blanket safety pins. "I'll assault the first person who opens this flap," he threatened. "Has she gone?"

"Fat boy come out," cooed a soft voice, its owner having been encouraged by Emma's nods and smiles.

Stacy dived for the protection of his blankets but he was on the alert at the sound of Lieutenant Wingate's voice.

"Young woman, you will have to go away from here," Hippy was saying. "Come around later. Our friend is too bashful to show himself now, but I promise that you shall see him later."

"No she won't; not if I see her first!" yelled the fat boy. "I am going to get out of this. I don't think much of a moon that is shining around all day long." Stacy raised the tent wall and peered out. To his great relief Moon Face was walking slowly away, whereupon he got up and dressed. He appeared outside soon after that, red-faced and considerably ruffled.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"I am sure I don't know. Perhaps you had better run and catch up with the girl if you are so eager to see her," suggested Emma sweetly.

"Bosh!" grunted Stacy.

San Antone, coming into camp at this juncture after a look about, informed the Overlanders that large numbers of Indians had come in in the early morning to attend the Omaha dance, so after breakfast the party went out for a stroll among the villages to look them over. Here and there black looks from snapping black eyes were directed at them, but the Riders were not molested. On their stroll they passed the tepee of Buffalo Face, but, so far as their observation went, the chief did not look at them.

It was the Omaha house, however, that attracted their special attention that morning, a low, rambling building with a crudely constructed chimney at one end. The building was closed and locked, and squaws, sitting about outside the tepees in its vicinity, were busily engaged in preparing the head dresses and the costumes for the dancers. All this was new and interesting to the visitors, who were eagerly looking forward to the festivities that were to take place that night.

"It looks to me-all as if it were going to be a large evening," observed Stacy, thoughtfully gazing up at the skies.

"That is because Moon Face will be there," answered Emma sweetly.

"If she is I'll go home," threatened Stacy. "Do we carry our side arms to-night?"

"We certainly do not," replied Tom with stern emphasis. "By the way, has anyone seen Red Wolf this morning?"

"There he comes now, carrying water for the squaws," announced Nora. "Poor fellow."

At this juncture the "squaw" set down his buckets and began arranging his mourning blanket, which he was still engaged in doing when the Overland Riders came up to him. They greeted him cordially.

"You see um buck try kill last night?" questioned Red Wolf.

"Of course we did," replied Emma.

"Me see um buck, too. Me have big knife and —"

"Stop it!" commanded Hippy sternly. "Not another word. We do not wish to know anything about it! Do you want me to go to the Agent?"

Red Wolf picked up his pails and squared his shoulders, looking straight into the eyes of Lieutenant Wingate.

"Big Medicine!" he said in a full deep voice, and went on his way.

The Overlanders looked at each other, the same thought in the mind of each.

"Red Wolf!" they exclaimed in one voice.

"How awful!" murmured Emma.

"He saved my life," answered Hippy. "But not another word on the subject. We do not know, we must not know, or it will be our duty to report it to the Agent," he added with finality.

The Overlanders were silent and thoughtful for the most part during the rest of their stroll, and about the middle of the forenoon they returned to their camp, where they remained until evening. Following dinner they walked slowly towards the Omaha house where Mr. Comstock was to meet them at nine o'clock. Reaching the Omaha, they found the throng of Indians so dense that they had difficulty in making their way to the door. A perfect babble of chattering and deep guttural grunts, punctuated by the yelps of dogs, and here and there an occasional "woof" assailed their ears. The Omaha house was lighted now, and smoke was rolling from the chimney.

"They are cooking their feast," announced Tom Gray.

"Oh! That's good. Perhaps they will offer us something to eat," cried Chunky, his interest instantly aroused.

Mr. Comstock came pushing his way towards them just then. He was accompanied by three assistants and followed closely by Chief Chet-

woot. As the Acting Agent approached, the door was thrown open. Chetwoot uttered an explosive command whereupon the braves began crowding in through the narrow doorway, shouldering each other aside, grunting and all but coming to open conflict in their selfish haste.

The Acting Agent and his guests had been permitted to enter and take their seats first of all. Everyone sat on the floor on skins and blankets that had been placed along the sides of the big barn-like structure. The bucks instantly lighted their pipes, and, squatting on their haunches, began puffing vigorously. A thick haze of smoke soon hung over the room.

At the far end the Overlanders observed a drum suspended from sticks driven into the ground, while about the drum crouched twelve redskins, scantily clad, each carrying two drumsticks. They were the musicians, and the drum was to furnish the music for the dance.

In front of the big fireplace, and close against the bed of coals, the visitors discovered a clothes boiler and several covered earthen pots. A thin wisp of steam was curling lazily from underneath the cover of the boiler, the cover itself, under pressure of the steam, beating a soft tattoo.

"What is in that thing?" wondered Stacy Brown, pointing to the boiler.

"The feast," replied Mr. Comstock.

"Yes. But what is it?"

"That, I reckon, is where the fatted dog is simmering," replied Tom Gray.

"Yes," said the Acting Agent, nodding. "Fatted dog is considered a great delicacy at these feasts and dances. The Indian squaws have been engaged for several weeks in fattening the cur for this occasion. They take as much care and pains in feeding the animal as you would in preparing a young pig for eating — perhaps more so," Mr. Comstock informed them.

"I — I presume they remove the bark before putting the animal on the fire, do they not?" asked Emma demurely.

The Overland Riders groaned.

"Quite so," agreed the Acting Agent, grinning broadly.

"I — I reckon I don't want any of it," stammered Stacy.

"Don't be a tenderfoot, little boy," begged Emma. "If you refuse to partake of the feast the Indians will feel insulted."

"I don't care if they are. I've got a pretty fair appetite, but it has never so far got the best of me that I thought I could eat the family pet."

"Stalled!" chuckled Hippy Wingate. "I —"

"Mercy! What's that?" cried Emma, and the nerves of the Overlanders jumped as the musicians gave a piercing yell.

"Do not be alarmed. It is the signal for the start," explained the Acting Agent laughingly.

Crash!

Twelve pairs of drumsticks smote the big drum at the same instant. It sounded like an explosion. Twenty braves, painted and be-decked, leaped to the center of the room, uttering shrill, piercing cries and long-drawn war whoops, the bucks and squaws squatting along the sides of the room, adding their yells to the general din.

The grass dance, once the most savage dance of the marauding Sioux, and still full of thrills, was on, and the Overland Riders found themselves wondering what the end would be.

It was a scene that none of that party of adventurers ever forgot — a barbaric scene of color and noise. The faces and bodies of the dancers were streaked with red, yellow and black, heads bristling with eagle feathers, sleigh bells jangling at the knees and ankles, and war bonnets hanging from the waists, their long streamers writhing on the floor with the sinuous movements of as many serpents.

There was, however, something thrilling about the braves that appealed to whatever was primitive in the nature of the Overland Riders. Outside the Omaha house a great throng of squaws and lesser braves were peering through windows

and crevices, their shrill cries of encouragement plainly heard above the din within.

Bronze bodies were soon glistening with perspiration, muscles became tense and drawn along the thighs and in the necks of the dancers, and stood out under their knees like strips of raw-hide. The yells of the dancers became more and more strident. They were fast working themselves into a frenzy.

"Bad business," shouted Tom in the ear of the Acting Agent.

"I agree with you. But it would be more serious were we to stop it," replied Mr. Comstock.

Stacy Brown's face was flushed, and his feet were now keeping time with the beats of the drum. The thunderous rhythm of the music was firing the blood of the fat boy. Suddenly he threw off his coat and sprang out among the dancers, instantly throwing himself into a series of wild capers.

"Hi-yi, yip-yah! Hi-yi, yip-yah!" yelled Stacy in a shrill voice, dancing away to the other side of the room, yelping as loudly as any of the painted savages.

"Stop him! Bring him back!" cried Nora in great excitement.

"Let him go. He is all right," answered the Acting Agent, rocking back and forth and laughing immoderately.

Chunky was still yelling, and now executing a fair imitation of the Indian grass dance, his body from the waist being thrown well forward, arms hanging loosely at the sides and every joint limber and loose like a jumping-jack. It was as if he were in imminent danger of falling apart.

"I do believe I could do that!" cried Emma, half rising, her face flushed and eyes sparkling.

"Sit down!" commanded Grace, pulling the little Overland girl down beside her.

The dancers, with the exception of Stacy, at last began to lag, whereupon the drummers set up a shrill chorus of yells to urge the painted savages on. The braves again sprang to their work.

A crash on the side of the room next to the fireplace attracted the attention of the Overlanders.

"Stacy has fallen over the wash boiler! He nearly went into the fireplace," groaned Miss Briggs.

The fat boy sprang to his feet and leaped away, a brave replaced the cover on the boiler, and the mad dance went on with more noise than before, continuing until one by one the braves staggered to the side of the room and collapsed, where they lay with swelling chests, and fingers opening and clenching.

"Oh, isn't it terrible?" murmured Nora.

"Stacy!" shouted Lieutenant Wingate.

The fat boy glanced about him and discovered that he was the only "savage" left on the floor, whereupon he began dancing towards his companions, making such funny grimaces that the Overlanders gave way to laughter.

"I could keep this up all night," howled Chunky, pivoting before his companions.

Tom Gray rose and fastened a pair of muscular hands on the perspiring shoulders of the fat boy. "Sit down!" he commanded.

Stacy sat down heavily.

"Young man. If you get up again until we are ready to leave the place I'll thrash you," threatened Tom.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, I understand," said Emma suggestively.

"How I wish I were a savage. Whoop!" howled Stacy, trying to rise.

"That wish was long since granted," reminded Emma.

"Oh, let him go," urged Hippy. "He has been storing up steam for a long time. It is a wonder, though, that the braves do not resent his actions."

"It isn't probable that the dancers have even seen him," replied Mr. Comstock. "The spectators, however, have thoroughly enjoyed his exhibition, and I am positive that I have never laughed so much at any one time in my life. There they go again."

A yell from the drum-beaters had called the dancers to action, and once more they leaped into the arena with a chorus of ear-splitting yelps. Tom Gray held the fat boy down by main force. For an hour longer the mad dance continued, then Chetwoot rose and waved his arms, whereupon the war priest got up with great dignity and began to speak to the Indians, now in the full-voweled tones of the Sioux. The dancing stopped instantly and the drums were suddenly silenced.

"The war priest is recounting past deeds of valor," Mr. Comstock informed his companions. "They are great braggarts. He is telling the braves how, when a young buck, he once caught a dozen white soldiers, and killed them all without himself getting so much as a scratch. He says he wore their scalps at his belt for many years until they fell off from old age."

"Did he?" inquired Emma innocently.

"My personal opinion is that he did not," answered Mr. Comstock laughingly.

The air in the Omaha house, already warm and heavy with the smoke from pipe and smoking lamps had taken on a thick haze. There were odors, too, that the Overland Riders did not enjoy, and that made them feel dizzy.

A brave removed the cover from the wash boiler and poked the meat with a sharp stick.

"I know Stacy will just dote on that dish," teased Emma.

The fat boy rolled his eyes, then leaping to his feet started at a run for the exit, followed rather hurriedly by the Overland Riders and their host.

"Where did he go?" cried Hippy. "Stacy!"

"Him go to him tepee," crooned Moon Face who was standing at the entrance to the Omaha house. "Fat boy him not feel verra well. Moon Face she want help him, but him say 'get out,' and run away fast."

"I don't blame him," declared J. Elfreda Briggs. "Do I voice the feelings of this outfit when I say we are all ready to go home?"

"You do," cried the Overlanders in chorus.

"Then good-night. I shall have to go back and remain until the last buck is laid out and the fatted dog is no more," said the Acting Agent.

The Overlanders breathed deeply of the outdoor air as they walked slowly homeward, discussing the exciting incidents of the evening. They found Stacy Brown in bed.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Hippy.

"I'm a sick man," said the fat boy with a groan. "I—I reckon I danced too hard. Uncle Hip, please, please give me a dose of that spavin cure that you use on the ponies. That's the only

thing that will touch this awful revolution that's going on in the inside of me."

Nora said she would make coffee at once, that they all needed something stimulating after the excitement, so a cook-fire was made by San Antone, and, after drinking two cups apiece, the Riders felt much better. Even Stacy had so far recovered that he thought he could eat a biscuit.

The Overlanders sat up for some time, recounting to San Antone all that had occurred, and discussing the evening's doings. They finally got to bed, the guide saying he would follow later, though it was not his intention to do so. San Antone knew Indians, and San Antone feared trouble. He was even more concerned when he learned from his party that none of them had seen Buffalo Face that evening.

San Antone was putting fresh fuel on the fire, listening to the murmured conversation of the Overlanders in their tents and the distant boom of the drum in the Omaha house, when there came an interruption. A voice hailed him from the darkness, the soft "who-o-o" of an Indian who wished to attract attention.

"Come out!" commanded the guide. "Come out careful-like or I'll shoot," he added, snapping out his revolver, but as the guide saw the figure that emerged from the shadows, his weapon

sagged back into its holster, though his face took on a deep frown. San Antone was amazed and displeased.

“Moon Face!”

San Antone's displeasure was destined to assume a stronger note when he learned the reason for the call of Buffalo Face's daughter.

CHAPTER XXI

PERIL FACES THE OVERLANDERS

“**W**HAT do you want?” demanded the guide.

“Me see fat boy.”

“No! Get out of heah!”

“Me see Big Medicine then. Must see. Much trouble.”

San Antone peered at the girl and saw that her face was troubled. He told her to say her say and be gone.

“Buffalo Face him much mad. Not go to Omaha because mad. Mebby he come to-night and make bad medicine for fat boy and Big Medicine. Moon Face 'fraid. Moon Face go now. You go — all go!”

“Go on! Tell that old ruffian, Buffalo Face, thet he can't come too quick to suit this heah outfit,” snarled San Antone.

The Indian girl disappeared in the darkness while he was speaking. Something had hurried her departure, and that something at this juncture appeared in the shape of a man in the light

of the campfire. The guide recognized him at once as one of the Acting Agent's assistants, Carver by name.

"How!" greeted Carver. "There's trouble afoot. Where's the outfit? I must see one of the men."

"Indians?" questioned San Antone.

"Yes."

"Then it warn't no fairy story thet the little squaw was tellin' me a minute before you-all came. I'll call Lieutenant Wingate if you-all got to see him. Wait!"

A few moments later Hippy and Tom Gray appeared in their pajamas.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hippy.

"Mr. Comstock sent me to warn you that he fears there is trouble ahead for you people. He has learned that Buffalo Face's scouts have been stirring the Indians up and that, though he does not know how the Indians propose to annoy you, he fears that your camp may be rushed," said the messenger.

"Let 'em rush!" answered Hippy stubbornly. "We will be here after they have gone away."

"I reckon you-all will," agreed San Antone. "Mebby Buffalo Face will be heah too — till they carry him off."

"The Acting Agent has sent for Buffalo to warn him that he will be held personally re-

sponsible if you people are subjected to annoyance," resumed the messenger. "That is all very well, so far as it goes, but Buffalo Face will see to it that he is not involved. He will put the blame on others, and we won't be able to prove that he isn't telling the truth."

"What does Mr. Comstock advise us to do?" questioned Tom.

"He has directed me to ask you to move your camp at once—to do this especially as a favor to him. If you decide to remain he will do his best to protect you, but he fears that, in the present state of unrest on the reservation, the Indians might get wholly out of control. It is not the Indian property owners, the farmers and stock raisers, but the roving bands that are causing us so much trouble of late. Which way do you travel from here?"

"Goldtown," answered San Antone.

"Then your best plan, upon leaving here, would be to go due north for five or six miles to Dade's gulch; then you can head west again."

"What is to prevent the Indians following us?" asked Tom.

"Oh, they are too busy dancing, and will be until sometime late to-morrow. By that time they will be so wrought up that the least little encouragement will start them going. If you take the route I suggest your departure is not

likely to be observed by the Indians, most of whom are at the Omaha house."

"What-all is goin' on up heah in these Hills gets me," complained the guide, frowning heavily. "What do you-all reckon it air?"

"We don't know," replied Carver. "There is some influence at work that, if not checked, will lead to an uprising. We are nearer it now than we have been in many years. The Acting Agent is sorry to have to shorten your stay here, and asks you to excuse him for not coming in person to deliver his message. He thinks best to stick it out until the Omaha ends. What do you think you will do?"

Tom, Hippy and the guide consulted for a few moments before giving their answer.

"We will move at once," finally announced Tom.

"Thank you. Go as quietly as possible and without lights. I do not believe you will be observed." Mr. Carver shook hands with the three men and started back to the reservation.

"This is a fine mess! What?" jeered Hippy. "Better turn out the girls. Tony, you get things going while we are dressing."

"Turn out! We have had orders to move," called Tom at the girls' tent. "I'll explain later. Be as quiet as possible."

San Antone's first act was to put out the camp-

fire, after which he began packing up. It was less than an hour later when the Overland party rode silently from their camp and headed northward under a moonless and starless sky, for the sky was overcast and threatened storm. The girls of the outfit had been informed of the situation before camp was broken.

Day was breaking when they reached Dade's gulch, where they halted to cook their breakfast and discuss the reasons for their hasty move. The journey was resumed immediately after breakfast and continued until noon, at which time San Antone led the way up a narrow trail to the top of the gulch. He announced that they would make camp there until late in the afternoon.

"I reckon as you folks need sleep, an' I want to scout 'bout and see if we air bein' followed," he explained. "Mebby I won't get back till late, so don't you go to worryin' 'bout me."

"Tony, don't you go and lose yourself," admonished Emma. "If anything were to happen to you, you know it would break my poor heart."

San Antone flushed deeply under his tan.

"Thank ye, Miss Dean, but I don't reckon that it air tender enough to git broke jest yet."

The Overlanders had a good laugh at Emma's expense. Stacy declared that San Antone had told the truth, but that it would stand amplifying. Soon after that the guide went away and

the Overlanders turned in for a much-needed sleep, Hippy alone remaining awake to see that the camp was not disturbed.

The guide did not return until nearly six o'clock. He explained that he had been on a mountain on the other side of the gulch watching nearly all the time, but it required a question from Miss Briggs to bring out the result of his observation.

"No, I didn't see any redskins, but I seen their smokes," announced the Texan. "They air up to mischief, so I reckon we'd better be gettin' on an' make camp late in the evenin'."

They took dinner before starting away, then rode on until midnight, making camp this time in the wildest part of the Hills that they had yet seen. Stacy was asleep in his saddle when they arrived, and Hippy declared that he also had had a real good nap on the way, and that he was ready for another night of it.

"What is your opinion about our being trailed?" questioned Tom. "Do you feel that we are?"

"Don't feel nothin' at all. Ain't likely to be Indians 'round heah before some time to-morrow; then we'll hev to look a little out an' keep close to our guns. We're gettin' in lonesome land now, an' if they air goin' to do anythin' they'll do it soon, I reckon."

Hippy said he wished he had his old army flying machine to scout with, whereupon Emma Dean averred that if Indians attacked them the Overland Riders would see a flying machine in the shape of Emma Dean herself.

They prevailed upon San Antone to turn in, Lieutenant Wingate promising to sit by the fire and watch and listen, but the guide refused to occupy Hippy's tent. He said he would roll up in his blanket and rest for an hour.

After the others had turned in and San Antone was snoring, Hippy threw a blanket over his own head, for the night was quite chill, and sat gazing into the fire. It was not long ere he was dozing. His head drooped forward, and little by little the blanket slipped from him. Finally Hippy followed the blanket and sank over on his side. This brought him awake instantly, but as he straightened up, Lieutenant Wingate felt something cold pressed against his neck.

Every muscle in the Overland Rider's body grew rigid, for Hippy knew that it was the muzzle of a revolver pressing against his neck with considerable force.

"Git up!" hissed a voice in his ear. "Make a sound an' I'll kill ye!"

CHAPTER XXII

HELD UP IN THE HILLS

LIEUTENANT WINGATE rose slowly to his feet, the muzzle of the revolver sliding firmly down his back, followed by creeping chills along his spinal column. He glanced quickly at the guide, but San Antone was sleeping soundly, snoring rhythmically if not musically.

“Go straight ahead, but if you-all make a noise it’ll be the last!” threatened the man behind him in a whisper.

“What do you want?” demanded Hippy in as loud a whisper as he dared utter.

“Shet up! Do ye-all want to die?”

San Antone stirred, his snoring, that had hesitated for a second, began again at full strength, and at this juncture Hippy’s revolver was snatched from its holster and dropped to the ground by his captor. A slight thud occurred as the weapon struck the ground.

The guide sat up like a flash, but before he fully comprehended the significance of the scene,

a commanding voice from the bushes stayed the hand that was about to fly to his holster.

“Hands up!”

San Antone knew what those two words meant. He had not only heard them many times before, but on various occasions had uttered them himself. A glance told him that he had been caught napping. Four men just outside the bushes that surrounded the camp suddenly stood revealed, their rifles leveled at the guide. He saw instantly that they were white men, though their faces were covered with red bandana handkerchiefs in which holes had been cut for the eyes, the handkerchiefs being fastened somewhere up under the men's hats.

San Antone's hands went slowly above his head.

“That's the way to do it. Fetch that other feller out here!” ordered one of the four, whereupon Hippy was slowly and cautiously propelled forward, and a moment later was being securely bound to a tree.

“Now t'other one,” directed the same voice as before. San Antone was narrowly watching, waiting for the opportunity to snap out his own weapon and get into action.

The bandit, for such Hippy supposed the man to be, approached San Antone in a wide circuit, coming up behind him, apparently knowing that

the guide was dangerous. The fellow approached between San Antone and the Overland tents, moving with extreme caution, revolver in hand, ready for instant action, and all this time the guide's ears were straining to catch the footfalls of the man behind him.

A leap and a vicious blow from the butt of the revolver was struck at the Texan's head, but instead of reaching the mark aimed at the revolver-butt struck San Antone on the shoulder, because at that instant the guide had jerked his head to one side.

San Antone's hand flashed to his weapon, but ere he could draw it his arms were pinioned to his sides, and he was forced to the ground, with the crushing weight of a heavy body on him, tugging at his weapon to free it for action. All the while San Antone was struggling and writhing in the grip of his adversary. The Texan was wiry, but as he had often told the Overlanders, he "could not fight."

The two men rolled on the ground, struggling desperately, but without making disturbance sufficient to arouse the sleeping Overlanders.

At last San Antone succeeded in reaching the trigger of his weapon and fired through the leather holster, the bullet grazing the body of the attacking ruffian.

One of the four men on guard sprang to his

companion's assistance, when Tom Gray, awakened by San Antone's shot, ran from his tent.

"Hands up!" was the sharp command that greeted him, whereupon Tom's hands promptly went above his head.

The rest of the Overland party, not many seconds behind Tom, ran from their tents, and they, too, were brought up standing by the threats of the attackers. At that instant, San Antone was dealt a crushing blow on the head with the butt of a revolver. The Texan sank back, uttering a moan.

Stacy Brown now made a sudden bolt for his tent, but a rifle thrust in his face led him instantly to throw up his hands and come to a halt.

"I reckon that'll be about all fer this outfit," drawled one of the men. "Anybody else in them tents?"

No one answered, so the questioner searched the tents and announced "All out."

"You will suffer for this outrage when Tony wakes up," threatened Emma Dean.

"You-all keep still or you'll git it the way he did," warned a gruff voice.

"I won't keep still! I'll make all the noise I want to. It's my privilege to have the last word, and I'm going to have my rights." Emma uttered a shrill scream that might have been heard at some distance.

In the meantime San Antone's hands were being bound behind his back, for which purpose he was flung over on his face. He was then disarmed, after which Tom and Stacy were treated in a like manner and the Overland men, with the exception of the guide, who was still unconscious, were stood on their feet.

Emma's scream led the ruffians to make haste, and by the time they had herded the girls together and bound Stacy and Tom, San Antone was sitting up. He spoke no word, but his eyes were blazing as they took in every detail of the men who had attacked the outfit.

"Git up!" commanded the fellow who had struck him. "Git funny an' I'll settle ye right smart. You woman!" he snarled, turning to Emma, 'one more yelp out o' ye an' I'll put a quietus on ye that'll last you-all fer a week o' Sundays!"

Emma uttered a shrill, piercing scream.

"Now what do you propose to do about it?" she demanded. "I'll scream louder next time and I'll scream so loud that someone else will hear me. You are too big a coward to try to make me stop. Stop me if you dare!" she challenged.

The ruffian started for her, enraged beyond control.

"Cut it out!" commanded one who appeared

to be the leader of the ruffians. "We ain't got no time fer foolishness. You folks line up in pairs an' foller me. I promise ye that if anybody gits funny he'll git a bullet through him, an' that's no lie."

"Want to take any of the stuff heah?" demanded one.

"Naw! We got what we come for. Ain't that enough? March!"

The leader started away, looking back to see that his orders were being obeyed.

"Keep watch o' them wimmin," he warned. "I don't trust 'em a-tall."

"Hippy, shall I cut the rope on your wrists?" whispered Elfreda, who was directly behind him.

"What's the use? I have no guns, and they would take it out of us if they discovered that I had been tampered with," replied Hippy.

"I can cut it a little so that you can break it perhaps if necessary."

"Yes. But be careful," he warned.

Elfreda accomplished the rope-cutting without detection.

"I have dropped my little automatic into your right-hand coat pocket," whispered Miss Briggs. "Please don't use it unless absolutely necessary."

"Thanks," muttered Hippy briefly.

The captives were driven on for some little distance and then halted. The captors held a

brief discussion and then proceeded to tie the hands of each Overland girl behind her with her own handkerchief, but so firmly that no amount of straining could loosen the knot. The entire party were then herded in an old miner's shack before which they had stopped.

"Folks!" said the leader. "You-all kin git out if you want to, but ye won't git fur. You'll be shot afore you git ten paces away. The winder is open, but there's a rifle trained on it. Climb out if you want to."

"Wait a moment," called Tom. "Will you tell me why we have been treated in this manner? What do you want of us and who do you think we are?"

"I reckon we know who you be an' why we took you. Now shet up or I'll give you-all a wallop on the head."

The leader stepped out and slammed and fastened the door of the shack.

"San Antone, what do you think?" whispered Emma.

"What I think, Miss, ain't fit fer you-all to hear, I reckon. I'm thinkin' what I air goin' to do to them fellers when I get out of heah, an' thet's goin' to be mighty soon, I reckon," declared the guide. "Everybody keep out of range of thet window. I'm goin' to see if I can git out. If I do, you-all stay heah till I come back."

San Antone stepped to the window and peered out. There followed a flash only a few yards away, the heavy report of a rifle, and a bullet splintered the window casing close to his head.

"I reckon I ain't goin' out jest yet," he decided. "Thet feller shore can shoot," drawled the guide.

Hippy gave a heavy tug at his bonds and freed himself.

"Wait! My hands are untied. I'll let you all loose now," he said. He first released the girls and then the men of the party.

"I reckon we've got to wait till daylight. It ain't safe fer us to try to get out, 'cause some of us shore would get winged, seein' thet them fellers know how to shoot. I reckon —"

San Antone was interrupted by a heavy thud on the floor of the shack.

"What's thet?" he demanded sharply.

"Something came in through the window!" answered Nora in an awed whisper.

Lieutenant Wingate and the guide, crouching low, crept towards the open window. They were certain that it was not an animal that had leaped in, but if not they had no idea what it might be that they were facing.

"I got it. It's a sack!" exclaimed the guide.

He cautiously ran his hands into the bag after feeling of the outside, then grasping Hippy's hand, he thrust it into the bag.

“Wha—at!” gasped Hippy.

“Folks, I reckon thar is some queer doin’s ’round heah. Our guns is all in this heah bag thet someone has throwed in through the window,” announced San Antone in his usual confident drawl. “What do you-all ’low fer thet?”

The Overlanders uttered exclamations of wonder, and they were still wondering when the report of a rifle close at hand woke the echoes in the Hills. The report was followed by what seemed to be the crashing sound of many rifles in action, report following report in quick succession. Then a deep silence settled over the scene, broken only by the heavy breathing of the Overland Riders in the deserted shack.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RED MAN'S REVENGE

THE Riders crouched waiting, with weapons now in hand, for the better part of an hour, conversing in low whispers, not knowing what the next second might bring forth.

"Tony, why are we sitting here like so many bumps on a log?" finally demanded Lieutenant Wingate.

"I reckon we might as well get back to camp if we can. I'll try it first an' see if the way is clear and then come back fer you folks," replied the guide.

"If you go I go," announced Emma. "Come, let's not be tenderfeet like Stacy."

Grace and Elfreda said they agreed with Miss Dean, but San Antone announced that they were to remain where they were while he scouted about to see if he could draw the fire of their captors, and that, in the meantime, the party must keep away from the window. He crawled out a moment later and disappeared in the night.

"Don't seem to be nobody 'bout heah," he announced upon his return some little time later. "I reckon we can go on now."

The Overlanders quickly climbed out through the window, and began their journey to their own camp, speaking in whispers and only when absolutely necessary. They found their camp deserted, the campfire now only a bed of coals.

"Nothing appears to have been disturbed here," announced Tom. "Do you think that shooting was started by Indians, Tony?"

"No. Heah! Lookit! Heah's somethin' fer you," spoke up the guide, pointing to a piece of paper pinned to the girls' tent.

Elfreda ran forward and removed the paper.

"Here is another message for us!" she cried wonderingly.

"Read it, please," directed Tom.

"'Overlanders!'" began Miss Briggs, holding the sheet near the glowing coals, which San Antone stirred for her. "'Break camp at once, leaving by the gulch. Go on to Goldtown. The enemy has gone north. They'll be back, but won't pick up your trail for some time. Make camp at Goldtown and wait if you would serve a friend. Protection will be at hand, but be cautious.'"

"It's a trick to place us where they want us," declared Tom Gray.

"I don't agree with you," answered Miss Briggs. "If I am any judge of handwriting, this is the same writing that was on the last message we received from our unknown friend. What is your judgment, Mr. Bennett?" she asked, addressing the guide.

"Leavin' off answerin' to the 'Mister,' I reckon mebbey you're right. Anyhow, this ain't no place fer us, an' I reckon we'd better be gettin' out hot foot."

After the others had examined the message and discussed it, the Overlanders decided to follow the advice of their unknown friend, but they were perplexed. They began to realize that they were the object of some mysterious purpose, and to suspect that they were, in a way, being used to further that purpose, as Miss Briggs very frankly observed, though what it might be they had not the slightest idea.

Preparations for leaving were immediately begun, San Antone guarding the camp well during the operation to see that no prowlers interfered with them, and while so doing, the guide's mind was occupied in trying to find the reason for the attack on them by white men. He made no progress in this direction, however. It was as much a mystery to him as it was to his charges.

The packing was finished in quick time, then mounting their ponies the Overland Riders, led

by the guide, picked their way down the steep trail into the gulch in which they had previously traveled, every ear on the alert for trouble, every rifle ready for instant use. The party continued on in this way until daylight through the peaceful fragrant night, the only disturbance being the occasional howl of a coyote. A hurried breakfast was eaten, following which the journey was resumed.

Goldtown was reached without further incident shortly after noon that day, and by then the spirits of the Overland Riders had been fully restored. They regarded the queer-looking place with inquiring eyes. The town consisted of a collection of houses and odd-looking buildings, located on a rise of ground, from which radiated gulches and canyons in all directions. The Overlanders rode into the principal street, which, to their amazement, they found to be grown up with rank grass and stunted bushes.

"Where are the folks?" cried Stacy.

"Thar ain't none except ourselves," replied the guide.

"A deserted city?" questioned Grace.

"Yes."

"Hooray!" cried Emma. "Isn't this perfectly and adorably romantic?"

"It's yours," offered the guide, grinning broadly at Emma's enthusiasm.

"I will take that big square house for mine," announced Stacy. "If I don't like the view I'll move to another one."

"Too big fer you-all. Thet's the Goldtown Palace Hotel," San Antone informed him.

"That will be all right. I am a fat man and need a big place. Where is the post office? I want to mail a letter home. Can I get a hot bath in the hotel?"

"What was the reason for abandoning this place?" interrupted Tom.

"Gold played out. You-all can see the ruins of stamp mills an' smelters all 'round heah. Thar's some queer stories told 'bout this heah place, too."

"Why not organize a city government?" suggested Elfreda. "I nominate Thomas Gray for Mayor."

"Rah! Rah! Speech!" howled Stacy. "I'll be chief of police, and I'll shut this town up tight."

"Then as the nominee for Mayor of this city, I would suggest that we establish a suitable headquarters," suggested Tom laughingly.

Laughing and chattering, the Overland Riders rode up the street and soon dismounted at a spot selected by the guide for their camp. Stacy immediately cut a birch sapling to a three foot length, peeled the bark off, and obtaining a

quarter-inch rope, fastened the rope to the stick, attaching the other end to his belt.

"For goodness sake, what are you doing?" wondered Nora.

"That is the big stick. It's my badge of office."

While the guide was busying himself putting the finishing touches to the camp, the rest of the party strolled away on an exploring tour. Doors were open, and in most instances hanging by one hinge, windows were smashed in, and the town generally was a wreck. In some of the buildings there were evidences of recent habitation. San Antone, when they told him of this, after their return to camp, evinced considerable interest, but what was in his mind he did not say.

Night came on all too soon, and with it a silver moon.

"I think that the chief of police should make his rounds now and see that all is well," suggested Emma.

"This chief of police doesn't make rounds," returned Stacy. "Besides, there isn't another human being here to disturb the peace, and —"

A long-drawn, piercing human wail awakened the echoes of the night.

"Oh, wow!" howled the chief of police, making a dive for his tent.

"Wha—at is it?" wondered Nora in a weak voice.

"I forgot to tell ye 'bout thet. I have heard thet this heah place is haunted — thet thar's ghosts heah."

Nora uttered a cry of alarm.

"How adorable!" bubbled Emma. "A real ghost, Tony?"

"I don't know as I reckon what a real ghost is. I always s'posed thet a ghost wa'n't real," answered the guide.

"Ghosts! Pooh!" jeered Tom Gray.

The wild wailing cry was repeated, whereupon Stacy pulled his blanket over his head.

"Where is that chief of police? We'll set him on the ghost trail and have him make an investigation," announced Hippy, proceeding to Stacy's tent and hauling the boy out. "Go out and do your duty!"

"I don't want to investigate," wailed the fat boy. "I don't want to be chief of police. I resign. Understand? I quit! There's too much graft in this town for an honest man like me."

"There it is now!" exclaimed Nora. "I see a light!"

Hippy ran stumbling towards the light, but the light did not appear to move. As he neared it he saw that it was held aloft, then all at once he made out the white face of a woman, her skin almost like wrinkled parchment, eyes that were deep set and wild, while about the head and face

clung a mass of tangled hair that, in the faint rays of the light, showed ghostly white.

Hippy could not repress a shiver, for the face before him seemed unreal, while the eyes, wild and staring, gazed at him fearsomely.

Pulling himself sharply together, Lieutenant Wingate sprang forward, stretching out both hands to grasp the ghostly figure, but his hands merely closed over a thorn bush. The light suddenly went out, and the woman, uttering a piercing scream, disappeared.

"Did you get her?" cried Emma Dean, running up to Hippy who was breathing heavily from excitement and exertion.

"No, I didn't." Hippy was mopping perspiration from his forehead.

"Was it a really truly ghost?" begged Emma.

"I don't know about that. It looked like an old woman — it was an old woman. I don't believe in ghosts. Let's go back."

"I want to see the ghost. Shall we go into the old smelter here and see if we can find her?" asked Emma.

"We will not."

"Never in all my experience have I seen such tenderfeet as the men of this party," complained Emma. "Give me a lantern and I'll go in. I am not afraid of ghosts. I think they are wonderful — so spiritual, so helpless, so ethereal, so —"

"So nothing!" growled Lieutenant Wingate, striding away. "Hey, there! What's the matter with you, Tony?" he called as they neared the camp. "Why didn't you come along and lay the ghost with your little gun? I believe you are afraid, old timer," accused Hippy laughingly.

"Mebby I be," answered the guide sourly. "I shore ain't afraid of anything thet is. It's the things thet ain't thet get my goat."

The campfire was flickering and crackling in the gentle breeze that had sprung up, and the moonbeams were sliding down the sides of the mountains as the Overlanders began plying Hippy with questions. Grace said the cries that the supposed ghost had uttered, reminded her of those she and Elfreda had heard on the night of their captivity.

"If that's so, this ghost must be some walker to get where she now is," observed Tom.

"Silly!" admonished Emma. "That shows how little you know about spiritual things. Ghosts don't walk — ghosts soar — flit hither and yon," she informed them, waving her hands to imitate a gentle flight through the air.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" jeered Stacy, who had come out from his tent to learn whether or not his Uncle Hip had laid the ghost.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned San Antone. "Someone is coming. Hello, there! Stand out and show yourself before I shoot," he commanded.

"It's the squaw-buck!" cried Grace, as Red Wolf, panting, leaning forward until he was nearly doubled up, came running into camp at a characteristic Indian lope, feet thrust straight ahead and every joint working loosely. That he had run far was apparent to the Overlanders, it being unusual for an Indian to be so winded.

Red Wolf cast himself at the feet of Lieutenant Wingate.

"What is it?" demanded the guide sternly.

The "squaw" began jabbering in his own tongue, to which San Antone listened with close attention, now and then interposing a question in the Sioux language.

"He says thet Buffalo Face, with twenty-five braves, has been huntin' ever since we left the reservation," the Texan informed his party. "He says they started huntin' over the southern trail, sendin' a scout up to the northern trail. Thet scout met a white man 'bout twenty miles from heah, an' thet the white man told him whar he reckoned we'd gone. The scout then went back fur enough to make smoke signals, which Buffalo Face answered, and is now on his way to Gold-town. He'll be heah to-night!"

The Overland Riders gazed into each others' faces, a troubled look in their eyes.

"Git yer guns an' ammunition. Fetch yer blankets an' some grub. Do it on the jump,

'cause we ain't got any time to lose. Leave yer packs heah."

"Ye—es!" stammered Stacy. "I'd a heap sight rather leave my pack than my scalp. Whe—re are we going?"

"We'll hide up fer the rest of the night in the old mill whar the ghost is. They won't dare come near thet place, I reckon —leastwise if she lets out one of them howls of hers. Rush it, folks! The Buffalo gang has got us heah whar they wants us, and I reckon we'll hev to fight if we saves our skins," announced San Antone, his voice now a cool, easy drawl.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FLAMING ARROW

“**N**O, no! Not go there,” objected the Indian. “Me show.”
“Go on! Why not?”

“*Tamahnous!*” muttered the Indian.

“He says the place is haunted,” interpreted the guide, “an’ I reckon he-all is right. You show, ‘Squaw.’”

Red Wolf led the way to a mill half way up the gulch-side, the Overlanders following and leading their ponies, for they had no intention of leaving them for the Indians to steal. Arriving at the mill, the ponies were led in and tied.

“I reckon we ought to get word to the Agency or the fort right smart,” suggested San Antone. “We may be able to hold them critters off, but we never will get out of these heah Hills alive so long as Buffalo’s crazy braves is after us. Nobody never comes heah, so we can’t look fer any help thet way. ‘Squaw!’ You-all got to go to the Agency and get soldiers. Take one of the ponies.”

“Me go. Me go foot, not pony. Not go

Agency. Me know where good white men wait. Me fix."

The Indian was off at a lope ere they could question him as to what he meant. San Antone then began looking over their surroundings. Below them in the moonlight lay the haunted mill, silent and deserted, but the building they were occupying stood in the shadow of a mountain. As they gazed off over the valley, clouds began blotting out the moonlight, gathering for a storm, as San Antone announced.

"Make no lights, folks," he directed.

"That's right. Perhaps they will not know where we are," agreed Hippy.

"I reckon it won't take 'em long to find out," answered the guide, who thereupon gave his charges explicit directions as to what to do. He then announced that he would go out and scout for a time.

The old mill settled down to its customary silence, the Overlanders gazing from the windows with expectant eyes, but the night was by now so dark that they could see for only a short distance away. Two hours of anxiety passed, when a sudden exclamation from Emma called her companions to her.

"Look! A shooting star! How beautiful!"

They reached Emma's point of observation in a window just in time to see a reddish point of

light drop behind a building not far from their hiding place.

"There goes another!" cried Nora.

"Those aren't shooting stars," declared Grace.

"No! They air flaming arrows," answered a voice under the window. "The redskins hev come!"

"Tony!" gasped Emma. "Oh, I'm so glad you have come back. What are they doing?"

"Tryin' to set thet buildin' on fire, an' I reckon they hev done it," he made reply, as a faint light was seen on the opposite side of the building. "Thar's some folks heah besides Indians, too. I've seen 'em twice since I been out. Ye see, the redskins air makin' a fire so they can see. I reckon they know whar we be, but it don't make much difference. When it gets light from the fire, you folks keep away from the windows an' out of range of 'em. Don't shoot unless I tell ye to."

The Texan climbed in through the window and resumed his watching from there. It was but a few moments before the other building began to glow, then flames shot up, lighting the landscape in all directions, throwing the radiating gulches into even deeper shadows. Strain their eyes as they might, however, not a human being was anywhere to be seen.

"Thar's a critter!" cried the guide.

Stacy saw him at the same time. The fat boy,

forgetful of the guide's warning, threw up his rifle and fired at the head he had seen above the tops of the bushes farther down in the village.

"Take thet gun away from him! Get away from the windows!" commanded the guide sternly, himself crouching down. The others followed his example and threw themselves on the floor, and just in time, for a volley of rifle bullets crunched through the boarding of the mill, sending a shower of splinters over them.

"Sha—all we shoot back?" begged Miss Briggs.

"No! We'll need our ammunition later."

"You poor fish! You did it that time," growled Lieutenant Wingate, snatching the rifle from Stacy. "They know where we are now, and we shall be fortunate if we aren't all killed."

"Watch the back of the buildin'. Don't let 'em play any tricks on us—" The guide suddenly threw up his rifle and fired at a running figure some distance down the slope. He missed, and ducked back in time to avoid a quick return fire. "Them critters mean business. I nevah could shoot," he grumbled.

The words were still on San Antone's lips when a wild, weird scream echoed through the building, bringing apprehensive, half-smothered cries from the girls of the Overland party.

"It is the ghost-woman!" wailed Nora. "She

is here, in this very building. Let me get out. I can't stand it! "

"Sit down!" commanded Hippy sternly, and the roar of a score of rifles punctuated his words.

"You women lay down. You men get ready to shoot. They air gettin' closer, creepin' up through the bushes. I can see the bushes wavin' down below. Stop! Don't shoot at thet fellow!" cried San Antone as Tom Gray threw up his rifle to take a shot at the figure of an Indian staggering towards the old mill. "It's the 'squaw.' He's been hit. Thet's too bad."

Red Wolf paused, swayed and toppled over. Hippy, who had sprung to the front of the building, took one look, then leaped out and ran towards the "squaw."

"Come back heah! You-all'll be hit!" shouted San Antone.

Lieutenant Wingate gave no heed to the warning, but ran to the fallen "squaw," in the face of a scattering fire of bullets. In the light of the burning building, the Overlander made a shining mark, but not a bullet reached him. He gathered up the disgraced buck and dragged him back to the mill, where willing hands assisted in lifting Red Wolf into the building.

"Heap Big Medicine," muttered Red Wolf.

"Are you much hurt?" questioned Lieutenant Wingate.

"Yes. Me go. Great Spirit him say come! But me kill um Buffalo Face!" he cried, his voice suddenly loud and strong. Red Wolf rose to one elbow. "Me kill um with um rifle. Me brave!" he thundered. "Me no squaw now. Me kill Buffalo Chief. Me big buck. Me — Big Medicine!" he added, his voice sinking to a whisper, then into the great silence. Hippy Wingate laid him down with gentle hands.

"He's gone," said Hippy.

"Only a 'squaw,' but the bravest of the brave," murmured Grace Harlowe, then, as rifles roared again down the slope, now nearer at hand, the attention of the Overland Riders was turned to defending themselves.

"Hark!" warned San Antone as a volley of shots was fired from the left of their position.

"That is another party," exclaimed Hippy.

"Yes. An' they air firin' at the redskins," answered the guide. "I reckon the 'squaw' got 'em heah, but how they got heah so soon beats me. I —" San Antone suddenly threw up his rifle and began shooting. Hippy and Tom did likewise, for Indians were seen running, skulking away in all directions. At this juncture the burning building collapsed with a loud crash, a shower of sparks were hurled into the air, and the light was dimmed in a cloud of smoke, making further shooting from the old mill futile.

Out there in the darkness the rifle fire became scattering, a running fire, it seemed to the anxious listening Overlanders, and after a few minutes that, too, died out.

"I reckon thet's 'bout all," drawled San Antone. "But we got to watch out, so keep yer eyes peeled."

"Is it?" cried Emma, as a volley of muffled shots were heard, the sound seeming to be right under their feet. The shots were instantly followed by the wild, piercing shrieks of the "ghost woman."

"Oh, this is terrible!" wailed Nora who was sobbing hysterically.

"It's down under the buildin', too," announced San Antone.

The shooting beneath their hiding place ceased as suddenly as it had begun, nor did they again hear the shrieks of the "ghost woman." The Overland Riders, alert and watchful, waited with every nerve tensed until the long trying night came to an end and day began to dawn. As soon as there was light enough to see they laid Red Wolf tenderly away just back of the old mill, burying his rifle beside him, for were there not Happy Hunting Grounds in the land to which he had gone? It was a duty that saddened and sobered every member of that little party, for the humble squaw-buck had been a friend indeed.

"I reckon we better look 'bout a little before we start out," advised the guide as the sun came up and they were enabled to get a clearer view of their surroundings. "Hey! Will ye look at thet? I reckoned on somethin' like thet," he cried.

The Overlanders running to him saw the Man in Black coming up the slope towards the old mill, his sack over his shoulder, his long black coat whipping in the morning breeze.

"Professor Black!" cried the girls in a glad tone.

"How!" greeted the professor cheerily as he trotted up to them. "Are you all right?"

"Perfectly all right, sir," answered Emma. "This is a happy surprise."

"Oh, we are so glad to see you!" greeted Grace. "What happened to the Indians? Perhaps you may be able to explain this and other mysteries to us. I have a strong thought that you can."

"Ah!

"The Ippy Do-Do is a rare old bird,
A rare old bird is he,"

chanted the professor.

"Many mysteries of the Hills there were, but mysteries they are no longer," added the professor jovially as he threw down his pack.

"Red Wolf is daid," interjected San Antone. "What do you-all reckon you know 'bout thet?"

"Yes, I know. Too bad," murmured Professor Black. "I know other things, too — things that you good people would like to hear, such, for instance, as your wonder over the excitement that you have stirred up in the Hills. But then there is always excitement where the Overlanders are."

"Not like this," declared Elfreda Briggs with emphasis. "This is a little too much."

"You may not have suspected it, but since the revenue officers have been making life miserable for the Kentucky moonshiners, a lot of them have come to the Hills to carry on their nefarious business. They got old Buffalo Face to assist them in driving out the revenue men who followed them here, and to frighten away all suspicious strangers. Buffalo shared in the profits of their operations, and was making more money than he ever dreamed of. Wild Tree was one of his chief aids — "

"Was?" questioned Miss Briggs.

"Yes. Wild Tree was seriously wounded in the fighting last night, and is now on his way to the fort, where he will be tried as soon as he gets well. Red Wolf killed Buffalo Face in a stand-up battle, man to man. The 'squaw' wiped the slate clean and restored himself to his former position as a buck among bucks, even if he did kill a chief. It served Buffalo right, for he has been responsible for the killing of several Government

agents in these Hills. Too bad they got the Wolf when he was hurrying to you to help you."

"Who are the moonshiners?" questioned Grace Harlowe.

"The leaders are Bat Spurgeon, Lum Bangs, a fellow who calls himself Swinton, but whose name is Shade Jones —"

"Thet's the cayuse thet collected the price of the cow," growled San Antone.

"Ah! I begin to understand," muttered Hippy.

"There is also the fellow who tried to pass himself off on you people as Jim Oakley, but who is a Virginia mountaineer and a moonshiner," added the Man in Black. "They plied their trade largely right under this building, and that is where the revenue agents, entering the place through a former miners' tunnel from the mill below, caught the law breakers, and after a quick battle captured every one of the leaders."

"Bat Spurgeon and Lum Bangs!" exclaimed Grace. "Girls, those names revive old memories."

"Yes. They are the men who caused us so much trouble when we were in the Kentucky Mountains," agreed Elfreda with a nod. "Professor, do you know anything about a supposed crazy woman or ghost that has frightened everyone except ourselves away from this place?"

"I know. She is real flesh and blood, the widow of a miner who was killed by renegade Indians.

She is crazy, as you say — mildly insane — and the moonshiners have used her by teaching her to play the ghost and scream and carry on whenever strangers were about. They took her with them to the old smelter where two of you young women were carried after your capture, with the intention of turning you over to her and frightening you into making admissions about your purpose in being in the Hills. You see the moonshine crowd suspected that you had some connection with the Government agents, and that they had some reason for so thinking, I must admit. We have sent her on to the fort with the prisoners.”

“Yes. But who saved our scalps last night?” demanded Hippy.

“It was the same revenue officers who had a brief duel under this mill later in the evening, for the moonshiners, with one or two exceptions, when they saw that the battle had gone against old Buffalo’s braves, quickly ran to their hiding place. The revenue men were led to the attack on the Indians by Red Wolf.”

“I say, stranger! Ain’t it curious thet you happen to know so much ’bout all this heah?” drawled San Antone, a heavy frown wrinkling his forehead. “I reckon it’s time for you-all to make a show-down.”

As he talked the Overland girls had begun to wonder anew about Professor Black. His voice

seemed to have grown deeper and to hold a more familiar note than before, but there was an elusive quality about it that perplexed them.

"San Antone, I reckon you're right," chuckled the Man in Black, sweeping off his dark spectacles, revealing a pair of twinkling blue eyes and a smiling face.

"Jeremiah Long!" cried the Overlanders in chorus.

"Our old Mystery Man! Is it possible!" wondered Elfreda Briggs. "Our good friend from the Kentucky Mountains who caught the moonshiners there and did us so many, many favors."

"Oh, girls! Isn't this a perfectly adorable surprise?" bubbled Emma Dean.

"Be you-all a revenue officer?" demanded San Antone.

"Is he? You bet he is, Tony. Pardon the slang, but it expresses my feelings exactly," said Emma. "Mr. Long is the chief revenue officer of the force, and they never will find his equal. Tony, isn't this perfectly exciting?"

"Then that Ippy Do-Do thing was all a fake?" questioned Stacy sourly, after the Overlanders had shaken hands with their old friend the Mystery Man.

"A fake? Mercy, no! Haven't you heard?" cried Jeremiah.

“About all I’ve heard are yells and screeches, a few shots and somebody urging me to get up out of a sound sleep and run,” complained Stacy.

“Indeed! I caught the monster Ippy Do-Do two days ago. Here!” The Mystery Man carefully unwrapped a paper from a piece of stone, adjusted a magnifying glass over the stone and held them towards the fat boy. “Look, and you shall see,” he directed.

“It looks to me like a flea,” jeered Stacy.

“Young man! That on which you are gazing is the fossil of that man-eating monster, the Ippy Do-Do, now dead perhaps a million years,” replied Jeremiah Long.

“Ha, ha!” laughed Chunky. “A man-eater? Why, that thing couldn’t eat a grain of sugar without choking to death on it.”

“Had you one of them on your person, you would change your mind,” answered Jeremiah, laughing heartily, the Overland Riders joining in.

The Mystery Man, upon being further questioned, admitted that he had used the Overland party to further his efforts to capture the moonshiners, knowing that the law-breakers would suspect them, and that when the Riders got near their lair that fact would be promptly evident in the actions of the moonshiners. The Mystery Man’s scheme turned out just as he planned that it would.

In the further conversation it developed that either Jeremiah or Red Wolf had watched constantly over the Overlanders during the greater part of their stay in the Hills, and that the Mystery Man's weapon had, on more than one occasion, discouraged prowlers bent on mischief — that the mysterious messages and warnings were his. He said that it was Red Wolf who threw the sack of revolvers to them in the miners' cabin; and on the same occasion that it was Red Wolf and himself who had driven off the white men who were holding the Overlanders until the leader of the moonshiners could be communicated with.

Mr. Long was eagerly urged to accompany the Overlanders for a time as their guest, but he declined, saying that he must return to the fort to see Mr. Comstock and send the prisoners away for trial. He promised, however, that he would try to join them later on.

Camp was broken that day, but before leaving the deserted city the Overland Riders set up a rude cross over the grave of the Indian, and Tom Gray inscribed thereon the following epitaph:

“Here lies Red Wolf, an Indian and a *Man!* Stranger, the accent is on the last word!”

It was ten days later when Jeremiah Long un-

expectedly walked into the Overland camp far up in the Hills, and announced that he had come to accept their invitation and have a "play spell," as he expressed it. He and San Antone, almost from the beginning, became fast friends, the Texan being particularly drawn to Jeremiah because of the latter's readiness with his weapon, and one evening, in the presence of the guide, Jeremiah confided to his hosts that their guide was one of the most notorious gunmen left over from the old West.

San Antone flushed deeply under the accusation.

"Thet's too much, Professor," he objected. "I nevah drawed a gun 'cept in self-defense. I nevah did," drawled the guide.

"Of course you haven't, Tony. You are a dear, sweet man, and such a gentle soul," cooed Emma, patting the guide's revolver holster and gazing soulfully up into his embarrassed face, to the hilarious enjoyment of the entire Overland party.

The journey through the Hills came to an end all too soon for the Overland Riders, and one day a few weeks later they turned their ponies homeward, regretfully bidding good-bye to the Hills that had given them such a large measure of adventure. Acting upon the suggestion of Jeremiah Long, they decided to take their next summer's

ride in the Bad Lands, where he promised that they would find all the excitement they craved.

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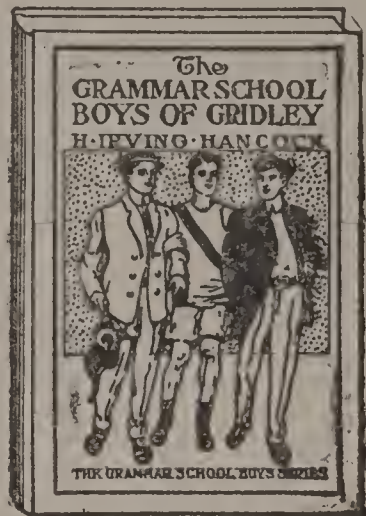
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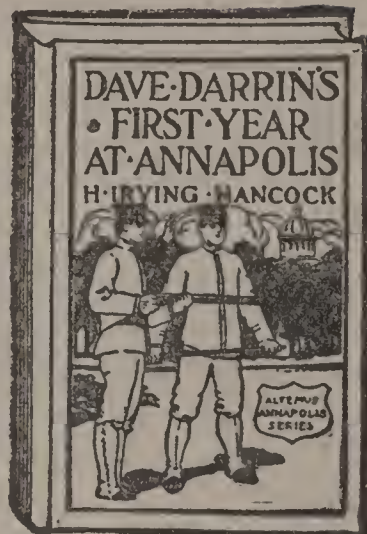
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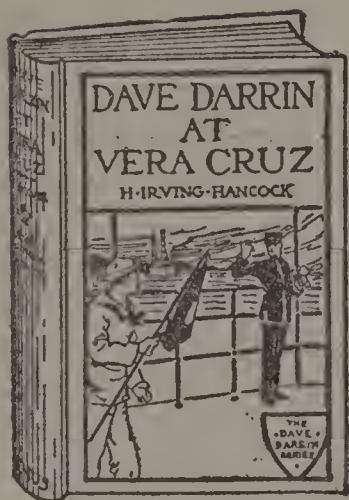


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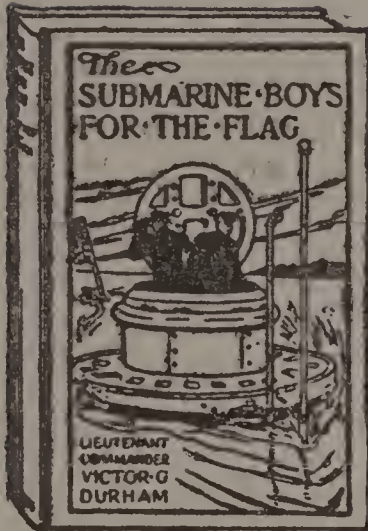


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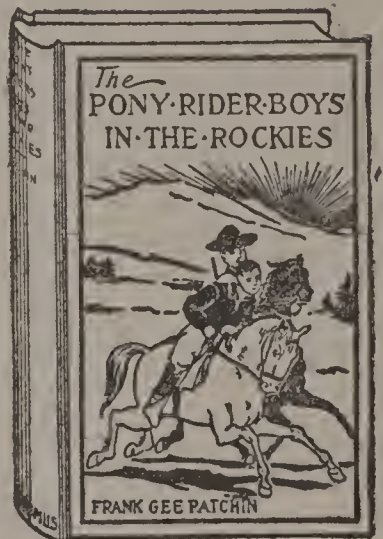
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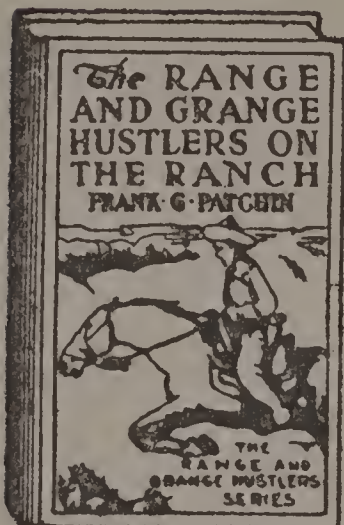


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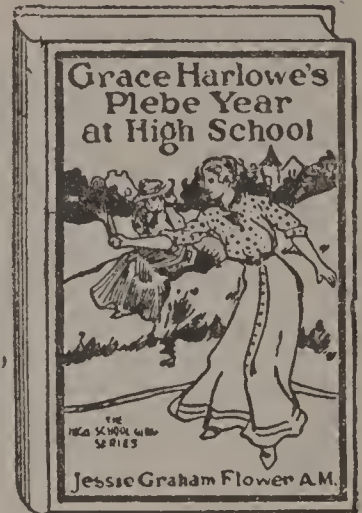
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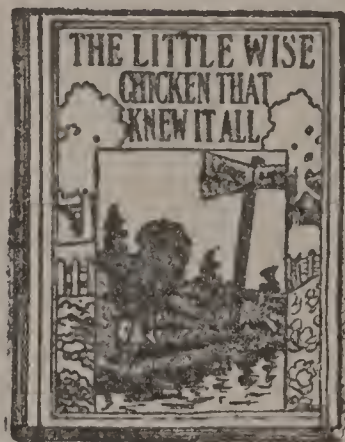
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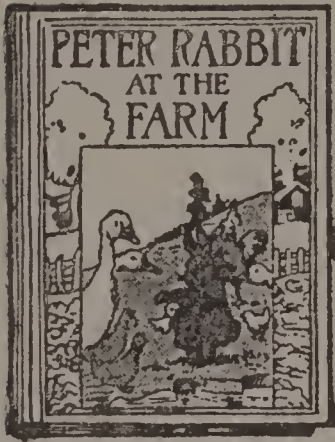
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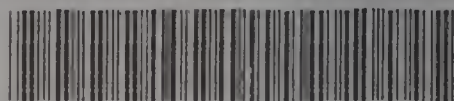
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